

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

**Crossing Boundaries: Religion, Sexuality, and Identity in the Lives of Zanele Muholi
and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde**

Janine Carlse

CRLJAN004

A thesis submitted in full fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Social Science in Religious Studies

Supervisor: Associate Professor Sadiyya Shaikh

Co-Supervisor: Professor David Chidester

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2012

The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who has taken this journey with me over the past three years. From friends and family to the entire Religious Studies Department, and those who always had some time to chat and help me work through mental blocks. Your motivation, support and generosity have carried me through many ups and downs.

I am deeply grateful to have had Associate Professor Sadiyya Shaikh and Professor David Chidester as my supervisors. I count myself as truly fortunate to have had such a knowledgeable and encouraging supervision team. Your guidance, advice and patience have helped me grow as a student, which also resulted in a yearning to go further as an academic, and to view myself as an example to others. Thank you.

To my parents, Zelda and Ronald Carlse, I love you dearly and appreciate the many sacrifices you have made. Through various life lessons, you have instilled in me the importance of education and perseverance, while trusting me enough to make my own decisions, and this has taught me to trust myself.

To my siblings, Rene and Jonathan, thank you for putting up with my many moods and providing me with a haven when I needed it. Knowing that I have the two of you looking up to me has constantly motivated me to do my best.

Lastly, to Peter Fife, my loving partner, you have always inspired me to follow my dreams, reminding me that I can achieve anything I put my mind to. You have been my rock, and for this I am forever indebted to you.

Abstract

The 21st century has brought new concerns to the fore within South Africa's democracy. Sexuality and the freedom to express one's sexual identity are currently at the forefront of academic writing and investigation in the social sciences in Africa. In following this interdisciplinary line of research, this thesis explores some of the ways that religious ideologies influence women's agency in relation to their sexuality and identity. In particular, I examine how dominant religious and cultural norms framed by patriarchal and heteronormative ideals are negotiated by black lesbian Zulu women.

My research is focused on the lives of two Zulu women, lesbian activist photographer Zanele Muholi and lesbian *sangoma* Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, who inhabit very different social realities from one another. Both these women are redefining the paths of women's sexuality in their specific contexts, while taking somewhat different approaches to this task. I argue that religion has a very powerful impact on the way that these women approach their sexuality and sexual choices, whether directly or indirectly, with a hybridity of Zulu tradition and Christianity influencing their lives in various ways. Muholi and Nkabinde are directly affected by religious ideologies through the way that they have to reconcile their sexuality with their religion and culture; and indirectly through the way that certain heteronormative religious ideologies have influenced the political and social structures within South Africa. Religious ideologies that divide humanity into the essentialist complimentary categories of masculine and feminine pose a problem for people who straddle both these spheres. By not fitting neatly into any of these categories, black lesbians are often viewed or depicted as not fitting into the social structure, particularly within and around urban townships, giving reason for their oppression and marginalisation.

Within many spheres of South African public and private life, there is a denial of the full humanity of queer individuals (whether gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, intersexed, etcetera). Black lesbians often fall outside of definitions of the “nation” and are thus marginalised and denied their full humanity in various ways. Not being recognised as an entity, as part of a community, or simply as existing, all form part of a denial and deconstruction of lesbian identities. Both Zanele Muholi and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, as black lesbian role models, find ways to fight back against these tactics of dehumanization and oppression within the South African context. They attempt to resist this marginalisation through various community projects, and by documenting black lesbian lives through interviews, photography and autobiography. This thesis therefore maps the various ways that Muholi and Nkabinde negotiate their black lesbian identities within the current South African context.

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Abstract	2
Contents	4
Chapter 1 - The South African Black Lesbian Context	6
Activist Photographer Zanele Muholi	9
Lesbian Sangoma Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde	14
Structural Analysis of Religion	17
The Challenge of Lesbianism	25
Creatively Relaying Awareness	28
Chapter Outline	31
Chapter 2 – Contextualizing Zanele Muholi’s and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde’s Lives and Work	35
Framing Zanele Muholi’s Photography	37
Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde – An Open Book	49
Conclusion	56
Chapter 3 – Fantasies of a Heterosexual Africa	59
On the Surface	61
Myth of Same-sex Practices as un-African	63
Immoral and Offensive	70
The Reality	75

Conclusion	78
Chapter 4 – Policing Sexuality in Urban Townships	80
Citizenship	82
Masculinity and Femininity	85
Lesbophobic Violence	89
Ruling Masculinity	93
Religion as Ideology	95
Religion as Enabling	98
Conclusion	100
Chapter 5 – Negotiating Black Lesbian Identities in South Africa	103
Self-Identifying as ‘Lesbian’	104
Crossing Boundaries	109
Community and Identity Politics	113
Coming Out	116
Conclusion	120
Chapter 6 – Conclusion	122
Bibliography	137

CHAPTER ONE

The South African Black Lesbian Context

The Innovative Women exhibition catalogue (2010) describes lesbian activist photographer Zanele Muholi's work as being "without precedent in South Africa, where there are very few instances of black women openly portraying female same-sex practices." This milieu, where same-sex relationships are mostly socially invisible, provides some context for the then Arts and Culture Minister, Lulu Xingwana's reaction to the works on display at the exhibition. Xingwana stormed out of the opening of the exhibition at Constitution Hill, calling it "immoral" and "against nation building", among other negative descriptions. She then left before she was to speak at the event – her department having donated R300 000 to the exhibition (Evans, 2010). In an article for *The Times* by Sally Evans (2010), it states that after Xingwana saw "a series of photographs by prominent artist and lesbian activist Zanele Muholi, of nude, black women embracing each other, Xingwana slammed the work as "pornographic", spoke to her aides, and left in a huff." Later, in a statement read by Lisa Combrinck, Xingwana said: "Our mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation building. I left the exhibition because it expressed the very opposite of this.... it was immoral, offensive and going against nation-building."

In reflecting on this incident, some questions arise, such as: what informs Xingwana's understanding of morality, the nation and social cohesion? and, why is it that in a country like South Africa, which fought so hard against discrimination in any form, is this still occurring? Xingwana has since been criticised for playing into South Africa's climate of homophobia that exists despite a Constitution protecting queer rights. The Minister's virulent reaction reinforces an observation made by contemporary scholar Marc Epprecht, who analyzes the

conceptualisation and creation of hegemonic African identity and the place that “dissident” sexualities occupy. He states that, “The most vocal proponents of a distinctive African sexuality from the mid-1990s are now African politicians and theologians who emphasize what they regard as positive or moral elements in comparison to corrupting Western influences” (2008: 161). As such, the supposed absence of homosexuality in African cultures is often placed high up on the list of positives. This politically fuelled notion of a “supposed absence of homosexuality” as truly African, despite many documented occurrences of same-sex practices within specific African religious and cultural contexts recorded by scholars such as Ruth Morgan and Graeme Reid, has very real consequences on the ground with regards to attitudes of homophobia and hate crimes. In these contexts, *real* Africans can therefore be known by “the absence of homosexualities in their traditional cultures and by their disinclination or intolerance toward homosexualities in contemporary settings” (Epprecht, 2008: 163).

African leaders such as Robert Mugabe and Jacob Zuma thus often appeal to “African values” as a means to contest homosexuality, “to resist improving public awareness about homosexuality, or to refuse to allow health interventions that might be interpreted as condoning or promoting supposedly deviant and un-African behaviours” (Epprecht, 2008:132). What underlines this largely political agenda is the use of religious and cultural ideals and practices that justify these views, which make a strong claim for certain conceptions of masculinity and femininity that are imbued with patriarchy and heterosexuality. One must remember, however, that the roles of religious institutions and cultures that hold in place notions of heteronormativity and patriarchy are entwined in a history of colonialism, apartheid, and other politics. Ideas about the west have infiltrated African memory and thought processes. Within the South African context, these religious structures and ideologies interweave through overlapping contexts. As such categories of

‘western’ and ‘African’ are far more fluid and overlapping than dominant political discourses recognize.

The homophobic incident described above at The Innovative Women exhibition, cannot be viewed in isolation from similar occurrences that happen more insidiously and less recognisably, and infuse the current climate faced by black lesbians. This thesis attempts to analyze the structural implications of religion, and its very real influence over the attitude that people have towards what are considered to be ‘deviant’ sexualities. Because of the prominent role of patriarchy in many religious spheres in South Africa, independent black lesbians pose a tangible threat to the normative ideals enshrined in this sacred symbolic landscape. Thus, the assertion throughout this thesis is that while heterosexist patriarchal religious structures have oppressed black lesbians in South Africa, this is not the full picture. Agents are able to come up against what are deemed oppressive structures and even work within them to facilitate change. To further this assertion, lesbian activist photographer, Zanele Muholi’s efforts to address this marginality and oppression will be analysed, as well as the position that lesbian *sangomas* occupy in this landscape, particularly analyzing the experiences of Zulu lesbian *sangoma* Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde.

Zanele Muholi notes in her essay *Mapping Our Histories* (2009: 19), firsthand experience that in South African black culture, “being a black lesbian is seen as negative, as destroying the nuclear heterosexual family, and as un-African. There are expectations that African women must have children and procreate with a male partner who is to be the head of the family”. Any deviation from this ideal is often recognised as a desire to be male and a disregard for “African tradition” and detrimental to the community. However, if same-sex practices are somehow incorporated into religious and cultural practices, as can be observed in the lives of lesbian *sangomas* such as Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, alternatives to the

heterosexual family may become available. The question of the different uses and displays of agency then comes to the fore in relation to religious and cultural structures. I argue that Muholi has drawn on a number of popular western approaches to agency and individuality, while self-identified lesbian *sangomas* occupy a more liminal space and find ways to navigate their sexual identities within their religion and culture by appealing to religious authority such as the ancestors.

Reid and Walker note that the focus of current research pertaining to African sexualities is to challenge “the colonial gaze that has been so influential in shaping an understanding of African sexuality, as well as to deepen and broaden the narrow public health perspective that sees sexuality primarily as a medical issue” (2005: 188). This thesis thus aims to further this research from a perspective predominantly framed through Religious Studies, probing the structural implications of religion on the agency of black lesbians.

Activist Photographer Zanele Muholi

Muholi was born in 1972, in Umlazi Township in KwaZulu-Natal, and currently bases herself in Cape Town, where she lives and works, when not travelling and exhibiting abroad. Muholi, being the youngest of eight siblings, never knew her father, who was an immigrant from Malawi, as he died when she was just a few months old. She was raised by a single mother, Bester Muholi, who passed away in 2009; she was a domestic worker for forty years and the inspiration behind Muholi’s unfinished *Massa and Minah* project (2008). Muholi has an activist history having worked for the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW), and as a photographer and reporter for Behind the Mask, an online magazine on African homosexual issues.

Having been a research subject myself, informing many outside ‘experts’ about our existence, lives, and realities, I began to wonder in 2001 how I could turn myself and my community from being objectified to become the producers of our own histories, knowledges, and subjectivities.... I envisioned us speaking to each other using visuals because anyone can look and have thoughts about a photograph or a film, even if they are illiterate. I wished for us to stare back as black lesbian-identified women, to resist and challenge the idea that our bodies can be researched, understood, displayed for heterosexual and western consumption. My objective was to produce work for the very same subjects I would capture, in order for them/us/me to see our likeness, and for the future generations to have a point of reference in our collective memories, in archives, and beyond.

Zanele Muholi, 2009.

This explains why black lesbian activist photographer Zanele Muholi (1972 -) decided to develop a focus on documenting the lives of black lesbians in South Africa. Labelling herself an activist photographer, she deals with complexities and representations within her photography with nuance, which encourages dialogue and inward reflection. When one recognizes Muholi’s Zulu heritage, and her current membership at a gay friendly church, the emphasis Muholi places on the importance of community, creating a history for future generations and on the process of “becoming” is then contextualised. It is, however, the way that she uses these concepts to aid her own agenda of creating awareness around the issue of lesbianism within the black South African community that is central.

Constructing an identity outside that of concepts and social roles related to heteronormativity and patriarchy is a difficult task for many today, and Muholi attempts to do this through her photography that predominantly documents the lives of black lesbians in South Africa. I am interested in exploring the kinds of strategies used by Muholi and how these might contribute to breaking the existing cycle of silencing and violence toward black lesbians in South Africa. I examine the ways that she challenges powerful structures such as religious beliefs and ideologies, and attempts to critique multiple forms of systemic

oppression, as well as the hurdles that appear in her path. When attempting to address these questions it is important to note the hybridity of the beliefs that black South African men and women hold, being influenced by indigenous ideologies as well as those brought from the western world during the colonial era. However, post-colony South Africa “is not only a hybrid in the sense of an irrational mix of colonial ideas and truly African expressions of belief and thought, but this hybridity.... has become a productive space that critically challenges reigning ideas and generates meaning,” it thus provides an “explorative space for the construction of new religious meaning” (Nel, 2008: 34), in this way influencing even engrained Zulu traditional beliefs and ideologies.

Knowing, or more specifically, *remembering* ‘where you come from’ is advice that Muholi offers freely to those who are too easily tempted to rewrite their own histories. And yet, this centering is less about some immutable ‘being’ for Muholi, and more about the process of ‘becoming’, of creating and crafting, and of consciously building homes and communities that make us accountable not only to those with whom we collaborate and craft, but to ourselves.

Sabine Neidhardt, 2006.

In *Mapping our Histories* (2009), Muholi notes that in her Zulu culture, the act of *taking* a photograph and preserving a life moment was the role of men, and women were the subjects *captured* “almost exclusively by the male gaze”. Because of her fascination with photography, Muholi first took pictures in an informal manner at occasions that had to do with her own personal life. She saw this as a way of asserting her right to record and document her own life, and by doing this removed herself from the traditional male gaze (Muholi, 2009: 14). This also gave Muholi the opportunity to use the medium of photography to her advantage and to redefine the medium in her own way.

Muholi had her first solo exhibition *Visual Sexuality: Only Half the Picture* at the Johannesburg Art Gallery in 2004, this exhibition “brought national and international attention to Muholi’s work and resulted in invitations to conferences, workshops, and further exhibitions” (Gunkel, 2009: 78). One of the ways Muholi questions the dynamics at play between the photographer and the photographed is by establishing a relationship with the people she photographs, thus calling them “participants” rather than “subjects”. The participants know what she is going to do with the pictures and where they will be displayed. This is very different to past anthropological and ethnographic images of the African body that were, in the main, “taken” by the white European male explorer, in which depictions were often one-sided and prejudiced.

In 2001, I took a photography course at Market Photo Workshop in Newtown, Johannesburg. Market Photo was set up by my mentor and famed South African photographer David Goldblatt in order that young and economically marginalized (read: black) photographers could gain access to training and skills. Having been a lesbian and human rights activist in Johannesburg for years, I began seriously to commit myself to visual activism, especially after I was given the chance to pursue a project that dealt with my life and work.

Zanele Muholi, 2009.

According to Muholi, her methodologies for her projects are “partly ethnographic and partly auto-ethnographic”. She draws from Carol Ellis in her definition of auto-ethnography as “a reflexive connection [that] exists between the lives of participants and researchers,” thus it “overlaps art and science” (Ellis, 2004: 29-31, quoted in Muholi, 2009: 33). Through capturing the subjective experiences of people within their social and cultural worlds, this method is different from traditional ethnographic research where the researcher attempts to have a more objective approach. For Muholi, getting involved in the participants’ lives and

stories is integral. Muholi thus aids the making of visible histories for black lesbian women through her photography and the writing that accompanies it.

Muholi asserts that her images “are about creating social change for my community and that means I must involve my black lesbian township community”, in this way she is aware of her position as both an insider and outsider. According to Muholi (2009: 32), she is an activist before an artist, despite academics and researchers defining her as an artist, asserting that “I capture images of black lesbians through firsthand experience”. Gabeba Baderoon (2011) notes that Muholi’s photographs “have helped to reframe ways of seeing the Black body, and brought the details of Black lesbian and gay life closer to the urgent center of South Africa’s political and artistic debates”.

In Muholi’s first published book, *Only Half the Picture* (2006), Gabi Ngcobo describes Muholi and her efforts, noting how Muholi explores the lives, visions, aesthetics and politics of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersexed (LGBTI) community, with a specific focus on black (lesbian) women in the post-apartheid context. Muholi transgresses the social taboos that govern what oppressed subjects can do and be and in this way she challenges “racist and sexist imaginings of black female sexuality” (Ngcobo, 2006: 5). Muholi uses her subjectivity to her advantage, to get into the places she needs to be to represent what she considers to be a ‘true’ or ‘real’ picture.

It can be surmised that Muholi, as an activist photographer, lesbian, and writer, has a lot to offer as a case study in the interdisciplinary study of religion, gender and sexuality. In the following chapters I will delve into the intricacies of how Muholi addresses the marginalisation and oppression of black lesbians in South Africa in response to societal structures that perpetuate heteronormativity and patriarchy, religion being one of the most powerful.

Lesbian Sangoma Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde

In traditional Zulu culture, a man must be a man and do male things and a woman must be a woman and do female things but with *sangomas* it is more flexible. I can dance like a woman and wear woman's clothes and dance like a man and wear man's clothes. I can do the work of a man, like slaughtering a goat or a cow, although in traditional Zulu culture a woman cannot slaughter. As long as I have respect for the animal that is being slaughtered, I can do the work of a man. Sometimes I become too much of a man and people will look at me and say, "Today you look like a man." That is when I know it is Nkunzi's spirit in me. If I am just myself then I am not too much of a man, I am feminine too. Then I know it's me.

Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, 2009.

The above quote from Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's autobiographical book *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma*, 2009, shows the fluidity of gendered roles that female *sangomas* encapsulate. A *sangoma* is a traditional healer that is believed to have a special connection with the ancestors. The unique negotiation of practices and spaces that a *sangoma* occupies has various religious and cultural underpinnings. It is not uncommon for female *sangomas* to have an "ancestral wife" that is often a younger woman chosen by an ancestor to help the *sangoma* with her work (Gunkel, 2010: 128). What makes Nkabinde different to other female *sangomas* is that she is a self-identified lesbian *sangoma* who is open about her same-sex attraction, unlike many other *sangomas* that practice same-sex intimacy secretly.

Nkabinde was born on the 7 December 1975 in Meadowlands, in Soweto. Throughout her childhood, she moved back and forth from living with her family from her mother's side, who were part of the Khanyile clan near Empangeni in KwaZulu-Natal, to Meadowlands where her parents and other siblings stayed. She was given the name Zandile when she was

born, and took the name Nkunzi once she started on the road to becoming a *sangoma*. Nkunzi means 'Black Bull' and he is Nkabinde's dominant ancestor, and is a relative from her mother's side. Nkabinde admits that being a *sangoma* and having such a strong connection with the ancestors, particularly her dominant ancestor Nkunzi, does cause some conflict inside her at times because she is not just living her life for herself. She therefore has to be mindful of dominant Zulu beliefs and ideologies and negotiate these with other ways that she may view reality.

Nkunzi, Nkabinde's dominant ancestor, was 45 when he died. He was a patriarchal Zulu man, and it could be surmised that this has an impact on the way that Nkabinde views herself and her sexual choices, among other things. As far as her sexuality as a lesbian, Nkabinde feels that this has been with her from birth. She asserts that it is not from her ancestors but recognises that her ancestors have supported her as a lesbian. For Nkabinde, her ancestors guided her and helped her become who she is as a lesbian *sangoma* (2009: 38). Although Nkabinde recognises that she was born lesbian, she does not disregard the ancestors' role in her sexuality and sexual choices. She observes that if Nkunzi did not want her to be lesbian, she would not have had such feelings toward women, thus Nkunzi must accept her sexuality as a lesbian (Nkabinde, 2009: 67). Thus, the role of Nkunzi in Nkabinde's life reflects a powerful negotiation of religion in the ways that she makes meaning of her sexuality and agency.

Like Muholi, Nkabinde had some form of tertiary education. She enjoyed writing and narratives and because of this enrolled in a journalism course at Pretoria Technikon (Nkabinde, 2009: 39), but only managed to complete two out of the three years it took to complete the course because of her calling as a *sangoma* in her early twenties. It is important to note the role of education here, since exposure to experiences that fall outside of one's

religion, culture, community, opens one's mind to different ways of thinking and placing oneself in the world. By the time Nkabinde started her training as a *sangoma*, she had already been exposed to many other experiences, which could have had an influence over her experiences as a *sangoma*, and what she took at face value.

Nkabinde met researcher Ruth Morgan in 2002 at the Gay and Lesbian Archive (GALA) and got involved in one of her projects where Nkabinde had to find and interview same-sex *sangomas* for a few months (Nkabinde, 2009: 78). This was not the first time Nkabinde had been involved in such research, as she had been part of Mpumi Njinge's documentary *Everything must Come to Light* (2002), which documented the lives of three female *sangomas*. The interviews Nkabinde did later got published in a chapter that Nkabinde co-wrote with Morgan in the book *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives: Female Same-Sex Practices in Africa* (2005). One of the first things that Nkabinde told Morgan when she met her was that she wanted to write a book, to be remembered. This autobiographical book, that I have used extensively, was first published in 2008, entitled *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma*. This book documents her views on sexuality and the ancestors' influence over her sexuality, as well as the sexuality of other same-sex *sangomas*. The interviews that Nkabinde did with other same-sex *sangomas* informed her own writing and helped her to place herself within a broader community of same-sex *sangomas*. Nkabinde describes "a strong need to be connected to other lesbian *sangomas*" (Nkabinde, 2009: 79), as for a long time she had felt isolated.

I didn't know how the *sangomas* I met were going to react to me when I told them I was out. Would they reject me? Would they stone me? Would they chase me away? These thoughts were in my mind because I knew that many of these *sangomas* were still living in hiding.

Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, 2009.

According to Nkabinde, because of the belief that being lesbian is not African, many same-sex *sangomas* believe that if they come out they would lose their clients and be ostracised. The work that Nkabinde is doing, of setting up networks for same-sex *sangomas*, appears crucial if this taboo is to be broken. In six months, Nkabinde interviewed over 30 *sangomas* and realised that she was not as alone as she had initially thought. Although many of the people she interviewed did not want their names used, this was still a valuable step in furthering the recognition of same-sex *sangomas*. Nkabinde, like Muholi, thus demonstrates just how intricately entwined the spheres of religion, gender and sexuality are, and how valuable research in this area is in contemporary South Africa. Thus the current climate in South Africa shows much negotiation between traditional and modern, religion and state, structure and agency.

Structural Analysis of Religion

Because strong and long-lasting gender hierarchies depend upon persuasive gender ideologies, we can easily understand why so many cultures posit gender ideologies that are grounded in religious beliefs, in beliefs in the gendered order of the cosmos, beliefs in gendered creation, beliefs in divine decree regarding sexuality and sex roles, and beliefs that define purity and pollution, good and evil, and sacred and profane, in gendered terms.

Roger Ivar Lohmann and Susan Star Sered, 2007.

There are complexities attached to a concept such as ‘religion’ and the nuances that come about when using the term cross-culturally. Ursula King notes that religion “structures reality – all reality, including that of gender – and encompasses the deepest level of what it means to be human” (King, 1995: 4). In this thesis I investigate the multiple ways that religion as

institution, apparatus, structure, and ideology inform understandings and expressions of gender and sexuality that are not only limiting but enabling as well. The above quote by Lohmann and Sered (2007), demonstrates the many ways in which beliefs about gender and sex are grounded and kept alive in religious structures. It suggests that ideas about gender can be conditioned in certain ways, linking concepts such as purity and pollution, and ingrain certain beliefs and ideologies. Religion is depicted as an institutional structure that uses various forms of power and symbolism reflected in its ideologies and rituals that often present the sex-biology link as natural and divinely ordained. Religion in this way can be viewed as quite restrictive and static; however, one cannot underestimate religious and cultural fluidity and complexity in various negotiations of masculinity and femininity. So even though gender roles and hierarchies often appear to be stable, people also find ways to work within these 'restrictions' in expressing and accommodating their gender identities within certain religious structures. The ways that Zanele Muholi seems to contest religious structures and ideologies that form the core of most people's primary socialisation and identity, while Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde invokes religion as part of her understanding her lesbian sexuality, are evidence of the different ways that religion can be approached in the negotiation of gender identities.

Most dominant articulations of religion, however, incorporate heteronormativity and patriarchy which influence people's beliefs as well as the way they view themselves as human beings fitting into the broader universe. Heteronormativity promotes a worldview where men and women are complimentary binary opposites, and in this way naturalizes heterosexuality as the normative sexual identity. Thus, heteronormativity combined with patriarchy facilitate a hierarchy that places men as opposite to and more important than women, and heterosexuality as opposite and superior to homosexuality. As Lohmann and Sered put it, religion tends to "define purity and pollution, good and evil, and sacred and

profane, in gendered terms” and this usually leads to the marginalisation of people who are not heterosexual because they are viewed as deviant. Religion as such can be viewed as a structural apparatus of power, in both restrictive and enabling ways, having a tremendous influence on one’s socialisation while also providing a means within which one can find ways for negotiating one’s agency.

A theorist who has informed my structuralist interpretation of religion, in relation to the power that religious ideology has in society, is Louis Althusser (1918-1990). Drawing on Althusser, one can observe how heterosexuality is rendered normative by the use of certain apparatuses, institutions and systems, with religion being one of the most prominent as it works on a personal and public level that permeates society. Althusser recognises two forms of apparatus, namely: “Repressive State Apparatuses” and “Ideological State Apparatuses” when analysing capitalist society. In his essay, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1969), Althusser asserts that Repressive State Apparatuses suppress rebellion and maintain the social order as envisioned by the ruling power, through institutions like police, courts and prisons, and thus functioning mainly “by violence”. Ideological State Apparatuses, on the other hand, make use of ideological modes of control and also help maintain the dominant social formation, thus functioning primarily “by ideology”. These ideological forms of control include family structures, religious beliefs, media, and education. Thus churches, which are Ideological State Apparatus, “use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks” (Althusser, 1971: 138).

When one looks at Althusser’s “apparatus”, especially in relation to his ideological apparatuses, and to an extent his repressive apparatuses, certain ways that heteronormativity permeates society becomes very clear. Dominant ideologies, in this case heterosexuality, are

imposed through institutions and structures that socialise us, and maintains the dominant power structure. For instance, within Christianity the dominant power can be postulated to be the heterosexual male - who shares the image of God the father and his saviour son Jesus – as Mary Daly put it, “if God is male, then male is God” (1973: 19). The heterosexual male maintains his power religiously through certain rituals, myths and symbols within different religions, cultures, and communities, which make his dominance normative. Within the Zulu context, for instance, men tend to occupy a dominant position within the social hierarchy, often facilitated through their leadership roles in the household, as religious leaders, chiefs and kings, even male ancestors are given more prominence than female ones. Many dominant religious narratives sacralise male power and heterosexuality, and people who do not conform to these dominant narratives, such as lesbians, often face violent forms of marginalisation and policing. Nkabinde notes that straight men are responsible for the hate crimes against lesbian women, as many heterosexual men do not accept lesbians (2009: 145). Thus, people whose realities appear deviant when compared to this dominant ideology of patriarchy and heteronormativity are forced into silence for fear of being ‘othered’ and marginalised, and this helps maintain the normative status quo.

For Althusser, ideology is a discourse that has deep effects on each individual subject, and this effect can be understood as “interpellation” (1971). As much as ideology is an idea that gives meaning, it is also material, physical, and psychological. Ideology works to “interpellate” or position individuals within particular discourses, making them subjects. This theory of interpellation can be applied to individuals’ reactions to certain types of art, such as that of Zanele Muholi’s photographs. For example, the reactions that certain people have towards Muholi’s images, or towards homosexuals in general, reactions of disgust or outrage, reflect how gender ideologies are often informed by heterosexist understandings, which

include dominant religious narratives within Christianity or African Traditional religions, as will be elaborated on in the following chapter. Ideology impacts people's subjectivities, informs how people think and behave in socially acceptable ways, having a deep affect on both structures that mould us and the agency we exercise. Religion, although having the ability to change over time, when understood as a structure with deep ideological underpinnings then becomes a very powerful tool in the creation of subjects.

From Communists to Presbyterians and from chiefs to womanists, the common denominator was the elevation of heterosexuality to a defining characteristic of Africanness, often exemplified in terms of virility, fecundity, and an organic confidence in the naturalness of sharply distinct yet smoothly complementary gender identities and sexual roles. Sometimes this African sexuality was framed in "respectable" terms of Christian monogamy. Often, however, particularly in literary representations through the 1960s and 70s, it asserted African men's ostensible right or even obligation to multiple partners as a marker of mature masculinity. Homosexuality – rarely defined with any precision – emerged in the process as an insidious, corrupting antithesis of African identity, dignity, and independence.

Marc Epprecht, 2008.

Epprecht's above observation becomes even more relevant when one examines prominent African religions and philosophy, as John S. Mbiti does in his book *African Religions and Philosophy* (Second Edition, 1989). Mbiti paints an idealistic picture of African religions where it becomes apparent that heteronormativity is intimately intertwined in these. For instance, according to Mbiti, in many African societies, "a person is not considered a full human being until he has gone through the whole process of physical birth, naming ceremonies, puberty and initiation rites, and finally marriage (or even procreation). Then he is fully 'born', he is a complete person," (1989: 24). Although the generic masculine has been used extensively in academic writing, Mbiti's description of the "full human being" in the masculine, through using the pronoun "he", also brings to the fore, even if indirectly, the

place of men and the importance of masculinity as normative within African philosophy and religion. Women in many ways therefore facilitate this process of becoming within their heteronormative capacity. In this light religion and genealogy, as well as ideas about sex and gender, work hand in hand in the creation and maintenance of hegemonic ideas around sexuality and sex roles. Added to this, while many African theologians like Mbiti are widely recognised in scholarship, few of their African female counterparts have received the same recognition in the academic realm, thus limiting potentially valuable contributions to this area of scholarship that may offer new insights and interpretations (Frederiks, 2003: 66).

Althusser does assert, however, that there is room for individual autonomy and this is what leads to change and revolution that destabilise dominant ideologies (1971). For instance, the emerging visibility of African feminist theology, in response to the historical marginalisation of African women within scholarship, is testament to the potential of individual autonomy. Ghanaian scholar Mercy Amba Oduyoye was one of the founders of a continental feminist theological organization called “The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians” in 1989, which currently has fifteen chapters in thirteen different African Countries, each addressing central contextual gender concerns from a theological perspective (Unknown author, The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians website). The South African branch of that circle has been very active and led by scholars like Sarojini Nadar and Isabel Phiri at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Martha Frederiks (2003: 67) highlights the contribution of women like Oduyoye that could help destabilise some dominant male-centric perspectives put forth by theologians like Mbiti.

Some scholars, such as Gevisser (1999 and 2000), have deduced that within the Zulu tradition, the religious institution of female *sangomas* and the acquiring of ancestral wives could have been a way of accommodating female same-sex intimacy, while also giving some sort of power to women as traditional healers. In this way the institution of powerful and

respected female *sangoma* also provided a space for alternative negotiations of intimacy as well as gender roles. Within the broader South African context, same-sex intimacy has now become more visible with changes in certain institutional structures, the Constitution being one of them. The fact that Zanele Muholi has the ability to document and bring into the public sphere the lives of black lesbian women, and Nkabinde can publish an autobiography, is also a testament to this more visible autonomy and agency. But has this really had an effect on how the majority of South African citizens view lesbianism?

Althusser takes it a step further when he places Ideological State Apparatuses largely in the private sphere and Repressive State Apparatus entirely in the public sphere. This is an important point when one considers the way that the Ideological State Apparatuses, such as religion, function. This binary between public and private is thus a prominent one, an example being the potency of legislation such as the South African Constitution that is framed in the public sphere, in relation to its effects on religious ideologies that fall into the private sphere. According to Althusser, “the distinction between the public and the private is a distinction internal to bourgeois law” and is an important factor in that ways that laws exercises authority (1971: 137). However, this distinction between public and private is not always as clear as portrayed to be. For instance, religious beliefs often influence state laws and even our understanding of human rights and citizenship (Chidester, 2002). Therefore, if these laws are implemented subtly or without suspicion in the private sphere they are likely to be followed without question in the public sphere. Examples of this being laws implemented on marriage, and ideals around family structures and heterosexual lifestyles.

A key component to Althusser’s theory is that the reigning ideology is the ideology of the “ruling class”. The ruling class that Althusser discusses in his work refers to the nineteenth century bourgeois class who make all the rules in a capitalist society (Althusser,

1971: 139). For my purposes, however, the “ruling class” can be altered to broadly mean the patriarchal and heterosexual male class (ruling masculinity) that were – and to an extent still are – in charge of the workings of society (Ratele, 2008 and 2011). Furthermore, the role of the ruling ideology within a society is concentrated through the ideology of the “ruling class” that holds state power. Religion therefore acts as an apparatus or tool that helps maintain certain ideologies that contribute to the socialisation of individuals, which are ultimately linked to power and control – such as women’s roles as mothers and wives and men’s roles as providers and leaders.

If one views heterosexual males as the dominant group, and this is reinforced by religious ideologies and practices, then religion and ritual “are called into service to present the sex-gender link as existentially and cosmically authentic, legitimate, and certain” (Lohmann and Sered, 2007: 7). The Ideological State Apparatus thus works with the Repressive State Apparatus and this is what makes it so difficult to break with what is considered to be the norm within society. The laws and ideologies that govern a society allow that any deviance is looked down upon and in need of correction. This can be seen in the reactionary measures taken against being homosexual, such as violence in the form of hate crimes or even imprisonment in some countries, which form part of the policing of sexualities.

These core theories from Althusser thus form a basis for my understanding of religion as a powerful social structure and ideology. It becomes interesting when one applies these theories to the current South African context where, for example, same-sex marriages have been legalised by the state since 2006. Within this context there are still certain religious institutions and political structures that are based on strict understandings of social relations, familial structures, heteronormativity and patriarchy, which are at odds with the institution of

a same-sex marriage. More specifically, the challenges presented by black lesbianism pose a very tangible threat to these embedded ideologies.

The Challenge of Lesbianism

Until now, black female same-sex experiences have been largely invisible and silent, and as a result have been under-documented in South Africa and Africa as a whole. Much international scholarship on the subject of gender, sex and sexuality emerged with the development of feminist movements in Europe and America from the 1960s onward. Moreover with development of anti-colonial movements, African scholars then slowly began to question the western interpretations of African sexuality, and in South Africa there has been a surge of activism and scholarship over the last 10 years or so that demonstrate an awareness of black women's sexualities.

Judith Butler (1956-) is a key theorist in relation to articulating new understandings of gender, sex, identity, individuality and collectivity. She makes the argument that neither gender nor sex is natural, nor are they categories of human identity. Gender is therefore not being but doing; in other words, how one expresses one's identity in word, action, dress, and manner determines gender (Butler, 1993). Butler thus calls for performances that produce 'gender trouble' within the social and symbolic order. This often goes against the binary conceptions of gender that are presented by heteronormativity through ideologies and language used by institutions such as religion. Butler thus "refigured notions of sex from biological fact to iterative performativity" (Lock Swarr, 2009: 525). She asserts that there is no male and female prior to cultural "engendering" of those two categories of identity, and

sexual identity is thus “performative”. Socialisation thus plays a prominent role in the way we understand ourselves as gendered beings, and this feeds into the importance that Althusser places on ideology and interpellation, as mentioned above. This can be linked to an observation made by Laura Fingerson, in her book *Girls in Power*, when she notes that: “Gender, rather than being property of individuals, is produced and reproduced in everyday social interaction. We show our gender by the way we talk, the way we dress, and the way we present ourselves to the world,” (Fingerson, 2006: 77). This goes against biological essentialist understandings of gender identity and sexuality. Nkabinde, with her status as a lesbian *sangoma* who transgresses certain ideals of masculine and feminine, falls into this performance of what may be considered to be ‘gender trouble’.

Butler further asserts that there are always points of resistance that cut across the social order and its structures of power and privilege, opening possibilities for subversion. This thus provides opportunities for visible resistance, as demonstrated by Muholi and the people she documents through her photography, showing that there are other gender possibilities outside those of the “heterosexual matrix” that normative social order is built on. Butler’s theories thus pose many questions about essentialist understandings of the sexed body, systems of compulsory sexuality, and how the body is “shaped by political forces with strategic interests” (Butler, 1990). These observations feed into many strategies of analysis within the current South African context, which focus on gender and sexuality driven issues. These are pertinent in relation to the female body in particular, and the construction of black lesbian identity. Fingerson notes that “our realities are indeed socially mediated, but we experience reality by living in and through our physical bodies, which are divided into notions of men, women, masculinity, and femininity,” (Fingerson, 2006: 80). This has a link to Butler’s assertion that “femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of

discipline, regulation, punishment,” (1993: 232). This then can further be linked to Althusser, who is regularly cited by Butler, with his Repressive State Apparatus that regulate, discipline and punish.

Butler’s theories on gender trouble and subversion against an established order, when looked at in a religious light, can be used to provide some insight in how religious beliefs, institutions, and practices serve in the process of subjection (making people into subjects) and interpellation within the social-symbolic constructs of society. This further may help to explain and locate the difficulty people have in accepting same-sex intimacy within society; and in turn aid the investigation into how homosexuals attempt to subvert these binary socio-symbolic structures and beliefs within society, and the ambivalence attached to this.

In most societies gender norms embody certain ideals around femininity and masculinity that are ultimately linked to the “idealisation of the heterosexual bond” (Butler, 1993). Generally this binary, complimentary view of women and men and their relationships with each other presupposes that when one is born as a boy or girl, one will eventually be a husband or a wife, father or mother, in a heteronormative sense. From an anti-essentialist viewpoint, however, sex and gender are not such fixed categories, but adhering to these categories often concretises one’s place in the socio-symbolic order of society. This feeds into an assumption and co-created understanding within many African communities that people “who self-identify as lesbian or gay or engage in particularly gendered same-sex encounters may be intersexed” (Lock Swarr, 2009: 525). According to Butler, gendering is a compulsory practice that leads to the embodying of norms – a process that is never complete or “carried out according to expectation” (Butler, 1993). Thus gender is not only a “process that is emergent in social interaction, but gender is an existing social structure that is developed by human culture, not merely by biology. As a social institution, gender orders

social life, establishes gender roles, and is a component of other social organizations of society, such as school, work, and the family. The gender social structure can also be thought of as our society's belief systems about gender and the status of men and women in various situations," (Fingerson, 2006: 77-78). Where then do people who do not identify as heterosexual fit into this social structure, if this view of woman and man has been passed on for so long and ingrained into ideologies and institutions that one comes face to face with each day?

Through theorists such as Butler, one is able to look at the ideologies surrounding the creation and implementation of gender and sexuality norms in a way that recognises their constructed and institutionalised nature. This background aids my discussion in relation to the creation of a black lesbian identity and the challenges that Muholi and Nkabinde face in addressing the silence around their lifestyles and those of the women they document. The exercising of one's agency thus becomes crucial if one is to subvert the social-symbolic order established and maintained by prohibitions and repeated performances of heteronormative identities.

Creatively Relaying Awareness

What is seen and what is remembered or re-membered by the artist in the process of creating the work of art or shown by the camera in photography, film, and television? Memory, including remembering and forgetting, may be viewed, in part, as a socially and culturally constructed process.... It can be a significant interactive process involving various layers and levels of individual and social "forces" that intersect or are intertwined.

Katherine Hoffman, 1997.

This quote reinforces a strong theme running through this thesis, namely, attention to the complex process of social and cultural construction. Katherine Hoffman notes that even photography has certain steps that have to be followed that have been influenced by different “individual and social “forces” that intersect or are intertwined.” Art is a very broad concept – covering everything from painting to literature, etcetera. This brief section looks at the ways that that Muholi and Nkabinde express their creativity, relay messages, and provide social commentary, through photography and narrative, respectively. Within the last twenty years there has been a shift in South African art, with a more activist edge appearing in the post-apartheid context. For example, South African black women artists, from the 1980s onward, have increasingly been using their bodies to address feminist themes and issues of identity in their work, namely artist like Berni Searle and Penny Siopis (Aronson, 2012: 1). It has been noted that the conditions that allow art to come into being are subject to historical shifts, such as “the sites of its display, circulation, and social functionality, its address to spectators, its position in systems of exchange and power” (Mitchell, 1992: 3), and all these affect the type of art being produced. This could explain why in recent decades South African artists, like Muholi, have been increasingly addressing social concerns, touching on issues of race, gender, politics and identity.

Many forms of visual culture such as print media are interested in portraying the LGBTI community but are often less interested in providing a balanced picture. There is often a tendency to either focus on the superficial elements of their lives, like social events, or their victimisation, for instance through hate-crimes, as the sum of their experiences. This is damaging for the homosexual community, as only portraying such images limit insight into the real lives and experiences of homosexuals. Such representations of the queer community often reinforce stereotypes and fuel prejudices. Muholi thus attempts to provide photographs

that show the real humanity of homosexuals, representing many aspects of their lives, and breaking the many stereotypes attached to the lesbian lifestyle. Nkabinde, through the retelling of her life story and interviews with other lesbian *sangomas*, has a similar aim to provide a more rounded view of the lives of homosexuals within the South African context.

Laura Cottingham recognises from an art historical perspective that “writing about lesbians and lesbian art from a lesbian position that affirms and approves of lesbian existence is itself an act of advocacy.... Unless more lesbians are willing to accept the necessity of advocating our right to exist and our right to our cultural heritage, our history as well as our present and future will continue to be lost, denied, trivialized, and otherwise damaged,” (1996: 75). This is a very important assertion in that without *her-story* it is difficult for one to see a clear way forward and establish a strong identity. It can be surmised that some forms of art help to maintain dominant ideologies such as heteronormativity, however, it cannot be disregarded that art can have the opposite effect as well, as demonstrated by both Muholi and Nkabinde.

Muholi’s images of black lesbian women and Nkabinde’s autobiography and interviews with lesbian *sangomas* bring into the public sphere what would have otherwise been kept private. Matthew Kieran makes an assertion that can be applied to this, in that “public indecency is a matter of displaying an image or committing an act in public that should essentially be considered private. Hence the display of highly explicit sexual images is typically regarded as indecent. However, this view itself depends upon a particular moral conception of the nature of sexual activities and relations,” (2005: 204). Moral conceptions are ultimately informed by ideologies, such as religious doctrines, and this can be related back to the theories by Althusser, as outlined earlier. In this way Muholi’s photography and Nkabinde’s writing question dominant representations of the normative that are displayed in dominant religious myths and traditions, the media, films, and photography, to name a few.

Thus through creative expression, both political and artistic, lesbians can address longstanding ideologies and canons that exist in different spheres of society.

Where a work of art – whether photography or literature – commends, praises or glorifies that which should be condemned, viewers are subject to conflicting responses (Kieran, 2005: 168). Both Muholi and Nkabinde aim to engage the public with their works and experiences, both emotionally and intellectually, thus confronting the heteronormative public with realities that are deemed to be religiously, socially or morally problematic, and this then gives the audience an opportunity to respond.

Chapter Outline

This introduction and theoretical framework has highlighted the ways that religious ideologies function to influence women's agency in relation to their sexuality and sexual choices. The ways that Zulu women (and men) choose to express their sexuality and how this expression is accepted by others, often has connections to religious and cultural ideologies that are framed by patriarchal and heteronormative ideals about women's roles.

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, my argument is based on the assertion that religion, whether directly or indirectly, has a very powerful affect on the way that Muholi and Nkabinde, as case studies, approach their sexuality and sexual choices. The following chapters will further develop this assertion, focussing on the South African context, and exploring the parameters for debate on black lesbian identity, agency, masculinities and homophobia.

Chapter two takes a deeper look into the work and lives of lesbian activist photographer Zanele Muholi and lesbian *sangoma* Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, and contextualises their importance within the South African black lesbian context. This chapter shows why these women were chosen as case studies, by contextualizing their work and looking at the ways they have used of their agency to fight the silence around black lesbian women's sexualities through writing, activism, art and community projects. As case studies, they provide a rich source of information about the varying obstacles that black lesbians face and how diverse their experiences are.

Chapter three analyses Lulu Xingwana's description of the Innovative Women Exhibition as "immoral, offensive and going against nation-building" attempting to answer questions of what informs this understanding of morality, the nation and social cohesion. This chapter uses her description to interrogate certain conceptions of sexuality that are present in contemporary South Africa, which is a product of certain prominent conceptions of a homogenous understanding of sexuality that often fosters resistance against lesbians in the form of hate speech, homophobia and hate crimes. It also acts as a point of departure when analysing the negotiation of a black lesbian identity in South Africa. There is thus a focus on historical perspectives on African sexuality, how the idea of same-sex intimacy as immoral has been fostered and justified over time, and how all this comes together in the contemporary South African and broader African context, feeding political agendas. This chapter thus contextualises the contemporary need to create a black lesbian identity and demonstrates how expressions and definitions of sexuality and gender have shifted over time.

Chapter four delves into the possible causes of hate crimes, hate speech and lesbophobia within the urban township context, with a keen focus on masculinities, femininities and power relations between the two, as well as the role of hetero-patriarchy within religion and culture. This takes into consideration South Africa's past of colonialism

and apartheid and, in the broader constitutional and political context, what it means to be a citizen and part of the nation, as black lesbians are often categorised as being outside of these. Issues of right and wrong sexual conduct also come to the fore as the definition of sex within certain cultures is often narrow in that it only accommodates heterosexual sex and this then further marginalises and ‘others’ lesbians. This chapter thus highlights the need for strong black lesbian identities that can come up against and holds its own against these forces that encourage acts homophobia, hate crimes and hate speech.

Chapter five takes a deeper look into the experiences and actions of Muholi and Nkabinde to show how they negotiate their lesbian identities in the current South African climate. There are very few possible role models for contemporary South African lesbians that encourage the search for a lesbian identity, and this chapter looks at certain commonalities and divergences that can be found in the way that Muholi and Nkabinde, as role models, approach their lives and activism. The implications of the concept of ‘lesbian’, the importance of community, and creating a history for future generations are emphasized. When looking at Muholi’s and Nkabinde’s strategies, it is clear that whether consciously or unconsciously, certain tools are displayed in their day to day lives and work. These help lay a foundation with respect to understanding the possible formation of a black lesbian identity or lesbian identities. This chapter thus delves into the intricacies of creating an independent black lesbian identity that negotiates existing patriarchal and heteronormative societal, cultural and religious, as well as political and racial frameworks. This analytical chapter aims to help better understand the experiences of contemporary black lesbians and the possible strategies available to them in creating an identity, and the obstacles that these strategies may come up against.

The concluding chapter assesses my research findings and observations throughout this thesis.

By using western theorists such as Judith Butler and Louis Althusser, and contemporary scholars rooted in African cultural, gender and sexuality discourse such as Henriette Gunkel, Ruth Morgan and Desiree Lewis, I aim to present a well rounded thesis that examines the affect of religious ideologies on female agency. I present religion as one of the most powerful structural forces. Therefore the effects of religion and culture cannot just be judged on the personal, subjective, psychological side but its broader effects as a structural force have to be taken into consideration in order to make sense of many people in society's lack of acceptance of non-heterosexual people. However, one must not undermine religion's ability to also provide an avenue to express one's sexuality, not just limit it.

CHAPTER TWO

Contextualising Zanele Muholi's and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's Life and Work

This chapter explores the lives and work of my two case studies, Zanele Muholi and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, in order to situate their use of agency and the creation of black lesbian identities as well as the forging of community. Muholi and Nkabinde have resisted the silence around black lesbian women's lives and sexualities through writing, activism, art and various forms of community involvement. By creatively positioning themselves in previously western and male defined spheres, like photography and autobiography, Muholi and Nkabinde have the ability to change the way that African sexuality has been negatively represented in narrative, text and image (Lewis, 2011: 203). So, although the use of autobiography and photography do not themselves bring about social change, they can inspire it and create a climate for it. As case studies, they provide a rich source of information about the varying obstacles that black lesbians face and how diverse their experiences are. Although Muholi and Nkabinde are not the only people working towards breaking the existing cycle of invisibility, silencing of and violence toward black lesbians in South Africa, their contributions toward this goal are valuable.

Labelling herself an activist photographer, Muholi deals with the complexities of representing the queer subject with nuance, in this way, encouraging dialogue and inward reflection. In her work, Muholi emphasises the importance of community, creating a history for future generations and the process of "becoming" – an ongoing process of change throughout one's life – to create awareness around the issue of lesbianism within the black South African community. Thus, Muholi, as an activist photographer, lesbian and writer, has

a lot to offer as a case study in the interdisciplinary study of religion, gender and sexuality. Through the following pages I will delve into the intricacies of how Muholi addresses the invisibility and oppression of black lesbians in response to societal structures that perpetuate heteronormativity and patriarchy.

Nkabinde's life shows the fluidity of gendered roles that female *sangomas* encapsulate. The unique negotiation of practices and spaces that a *sangoma*, particularly a female *sangoma*, occupies has various religious and cultural dimensions. What makes Nkabinde different to other female *sangomas* is that she is a self-identified lesbian *sangoma* who is open about her sexuality. There are many sides to Nkabinde, she does not just prioritise her identity as a *sangoma*, she also interacts with the community through her work as a tour guide at Constitution Hill and on the GALA Queer Tour, and is involved in many projects involving interviewing same-sex *sangomas*. The work that Nkabinde is doing, of setting up networks for same-sex *sangomas*, appears crucial if this taboo is to be broken. Nkabinde, like Muholi, thus demonstrates just how intricately entwined the spheres of religion, sexuality and identity are, and how valuable research in this area is in contemporary South Africa. The current climate in South Africa is defined by complex negotiations between tradition and modernity, religion and state, structure and agency.

When addressing the marginalisation of black lesbians, it is important to note the hybridity of the beliefs that many black South African men and women hold. Their beliefs are influenced by indigenous worldviews as well as those brought from the western world during the exploration and colonisation era, and that continue to be influential in the context of rapid globalisation. Both Muholi and Nkabinde have a Zulu heritage that is also influenced by Christianity, and as is shown throughout this thesis, this influences many aspects of their lives, and the way that they articulate and make sense of their sexuality.

Framing Zanele Muholi's Photography

I take photographs to remember those who cannot speak freely and to be remembered. I believe photography to be my first language, a calling that I received from my ancestors so that I could voice my issues and concerns. Whatever I have captured and still capture is for the world to see that we exist as black lesbians, women, trans men, intersexed, bisexuals, trans women – as queer Africans.

Zanele Muholi, 2011a.

Muholi, much like Nkabinde, feels a strong connection to her ancestors that provides her with a sense of purpose. This shows the centrality of her religious and cultural heritage that translates into her work as a photographer. When speaking about the motive behind one of her projects, the *Being* series (2007), Muholi said that she has the choice to represent her community in a way that would turn them “once again into a commodity to be consumed by the outside world, or to create a body of meaning that is welcomed by us as a community of queer black women,” (2009: 30). Muholi chose the latter path, her images aim not to objectify the subject but to build a history for future generations and to educate those in need about this subculture of black lesbian women's lives. Muholi further asserts that it is “through seeing ourselves as we find love, laughter, joy that we can sustain our strength and regain our sanity as we move into a future that is sadly still filled with the threat of insecurities - HIV/AIDS, hate crimes, violence against women, poverty and unemployment,” (2009: 30).

As a feminist activist photographer, Muholi examines homophobia and homosexuality through a visual lens. The formation or visibility of ‘new’ sexual identities, such as those represented in Muholi's work, call into question ‘old’ or traditional ones and this is what might be shocking to the viewer. Muholi's art thus complicates many current understandings of nationhood within the South African context, questioning understandings of belonging

(Aronson, 2012: 4). These images force one to question one's own identity and deeply instilled beliefs of what is right and wrong, or acceptable and unacceptable, beliefs that are often informed by religion and other social structures.

Contemporary art in South Africa since 1990 shows an intense awareness of the history of visibility in the country, how we have been trained to look at bodies and landscapes.

Gabeba Baderoon, 2011.

The above observation by Baderoon emphasizes a shift in South African art, with a more activist edge appearing in the post-apartheid context. The body has become very important in South African art and more importantly is very prominent in Zanele Muholi's photography that has been described as both artistic and activist. Desiree Lewis notes that Muholi's "preference is for a subversive marginal language that jettisons many conventions of 'tasteful' and 'aesthetically pleasing' subject matter, composition, lighting and focalisation" (2005: 14). She is thus challenging the dynamics of art and what is said to make good art or photography. Zanele Muholi's photography questions old notions of what art is and what photography is allowed to represent. Muholi's work has a political angle that strongly moves away from the notion of making 'art for art's sake', and through emphasizing the documentary elements of photography she provides a personal-political commentary on her work which has the potential to facilitate social change and awareness. Muholi's activist photography is indeed unusual and her photography leans heavily on redefining and subverting certain categories and definitions that have been placed on the female body, the lesbian body, the black body. As a visual activist, Muholi documents many aspects of queer life, such as hate crimes and the personal intimate experiences of black lesbians.

The focus of the section is on briefly placing Muholi's photography within an art historical or visual culture context that frames the importance and somewhat dynamic nature

of her work, which feeds into its activist quality. Muholi's photographic methods have ultimately been informed by African, as well as western modes of seeing. As photography in particular had its birth in the West, one of its first and most prominent functions was for imperial use during the era of exploration.

Henriette Gunkel in her introduction to *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa* states: "I am interested in the cultural and historical representations of female same-sex intimacy outside the axis of lesbian and gay cultures and politics" (2010: 4). This is an important assertion, as representations of female same-sex intimacy in society, when it has been shown, has usually been portrayed as something for male pleasure or the male gaze. An example of this in the Western canon of art is *The Sleepers* (1866), a realist painting by French artist Gustave Courbet. Courbet is studied in the European art historical canon, a well-known painter of his time. He is known for the way that he attempted to change his style of painting, making his representation of subjects more realistic and in this way similar to photography. Courbet's art is useful when comparing it to Muholi's images, as it helps explain certain shifts in Muholi's work that distances her work somewhat from European artistic norms.



Figure 1 Gustave Courbet, *The Sleepers* 1866

Courbet's *The Sleepers* was completed in 1866, around the time that photography was invented and first started being used. In *The Sleepers*, the two white female nudes are the central image, the women are embracing and this comes across as highly erotic (Kosinski 1998: 187). Courbet is certainly not the only European painter to have depicted the female nude and female intimacy within his art, but because of the sudden rise in the element of realism brought on by photography Courbet's images are somewhat different. According to Kosinski, because of this appeal to realism, he attempted to depict the female nude as she was, not hiding imperfections, while the intimacy portrayed is also not completely idealised. He does, however, show a more accommodating view of female intimacy, as opposed to the way it may have been viewed at the time, within a society steeped in patriarchy. This is evident in the way that many French authors of the time, such as Balzac and Zola, expressed a less than tolerant attitude towards lesbians in their works, "in which the lesbian is a symbol of evil, moral and social decay, harbinger of death and pain" (Kosinski 1998: 197).

Although there are many difficulties in comparing images across different historical and social contexts, this is important when trying to locate specific interpretations of what these images, like those of Courbet and Muholi, may represent. When one compares this image by Courbet to that of Muholi's photographs entitled *Triptych* (2007), although differing in time, place, context and meaning, the composition is quite similar with two nude women in an embrace capturing the full attention of the viewer. Muholi's photographic medium, her foregrounding of black women as subjects and her explicit political motives behind creating the images present a stark contrast to Courbet's heterosexual representations. According to art historian Dorothy Kosinski, Courbet's "image of the lesbian lovers appeals to the heterosexual male, perhaps, in that no other man is portrayed to challenge or threaten the role of the observer. The bodies of the female lovers are sensual objects that excite the

viewer. Their sexual activity arouses, even invites the participation of the voyeur” (Kosinski 1998: 197). Muholi’s images are not as voyeuristic, and are not for male consumption, but rather aims to encourage and challenge her audience to consider how her images of herself and others “inevitably engages the visual languages and discursive landscape of her racist and patriarchal world” (Lewis, 2005; 12-13).

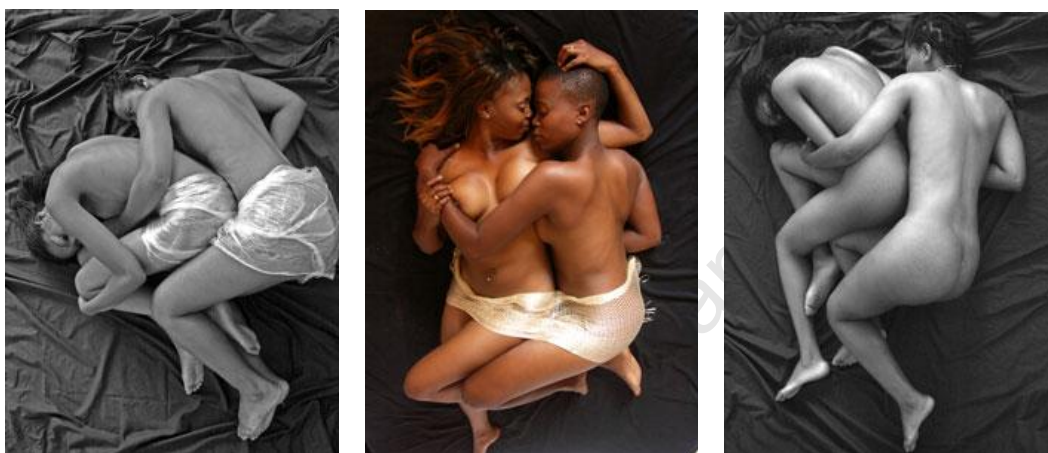


Figure 2 Zanele Muholi, *Triptych* 2007, *Being* Series

Gunkel also notes that Muholi’s “work de-romanticizes sexual pleasure by pointing out practices and commodities that transgress normative perceptions of (hetero)sexuality” (2010: 2). For instance the photograph entitled *Safe Sex II* (2003), which shows a black woman strapping on (or taking off) a white dildo with a condom on it. This image speaks back to South Africa’s apartheid history and normative understandings of sexual intercourse, while also asking questions about the sexual health of lesbians. Representations of the female body or female intimacy, whether same-sex or not, has always had an underlying assumption of being for the male heterosexual viewer, but as one can see in *Safe Sex II*, Muholi’s images transgress this. This dynamic of viewer and subject can then be traced back into European art

history where the heterosexualized white female body was the typical nude subject, and the viewer was assumed to be the white heterosexual male, and Muholi questions this dynamic. However, the way Muholi questions the visibility of female same-sex practices very publicly, bringing the private into the public sphere, has the potential to do harm as well as good in a conservative South African context laden with homophobia.



Figure 3 Zanele Muholi, *Safe Sex II*, 2003

Ann Ferguson (2007: 47) notes, bodies that are “lesbian, and gay in public are abject bodies, bodies that should not be in public, that are out of place, that violate boundaries, and thus arouse disgust”. Ferguson borrows from Judith Butler when she speaks about abject bodies, and this can be related to Muholi’s images as she places these abject bodies into the public sphere through exhibitions, art galleries, the internet, and conferences. These bodies

symbolize “irrationality, excess, and uncontrollable pleasure demanding visibility” (Ferguson, 2007: 47). Morality and immorality then become key concepts when defining what these bodies represent, and in our still largely conservative South African context, intimacy of any kind is still a private affair, grounded by ideals around morality and dignity. So although there is already discomfort with showing intimacy in the public sphere, there tends to be a deeper feeling of abhorrence when a light is shone on ‘deviant’ sexual intimacy.

The black female nude, in particular, to take Ferguson’s observation further, even in contemporary South Africa, is not usually shown in visual culture – whether art, television, print media and advertisements. The viewer is therefore accustomed to seeing the European/white nude and this adds to the shock value of Muholi’s work as her images are in a sense ‘closer to home’ for many black South Africans. Muholi takes her subject out of traditional realms of looking, taking the black body out of predominantly anthropological and ethnographical representations of the past, while taking advantage of the element of ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ that documentary photography provides.

Photography has often functioned as a powerful instrument of masculine and colonial domination, with black women generally being instrumentalised images for other’s self-definition and gratification.... images of black women have always been governed by prevailing attitudes to race, gender and sexuality.

Desiree Lewis, 2005.

The above quote by Desiree Lewis highlights the history of photography, the way that from its inception it has been used as a tool of domination. Imperial racism marked black bodies as essentially different from white bodies (Lock Swarr, 2009: 526). The representations of the bodies of black women are a prominent theme in photography’s history, from exploration to colonisation and beyond, the black female body has largely been treated as object. Muholi turns this on its head, she is a black woman taking photographs of and representing black

women who are not portrayed in a stereotypical way. Her photographs aim to empower rather than victimise. The black women in Muholi's photographs now have the ability to redefine themselves, an opportunity to be something other than exotic and sexualised, and in this way Muholi is showing responsible agency. Muholi knows and is familiar with her subjects, the "capturing" or "taking" of the photograph is largely avoided in this sense, and so is the traditional dynamic present between the photographer and the photographed.

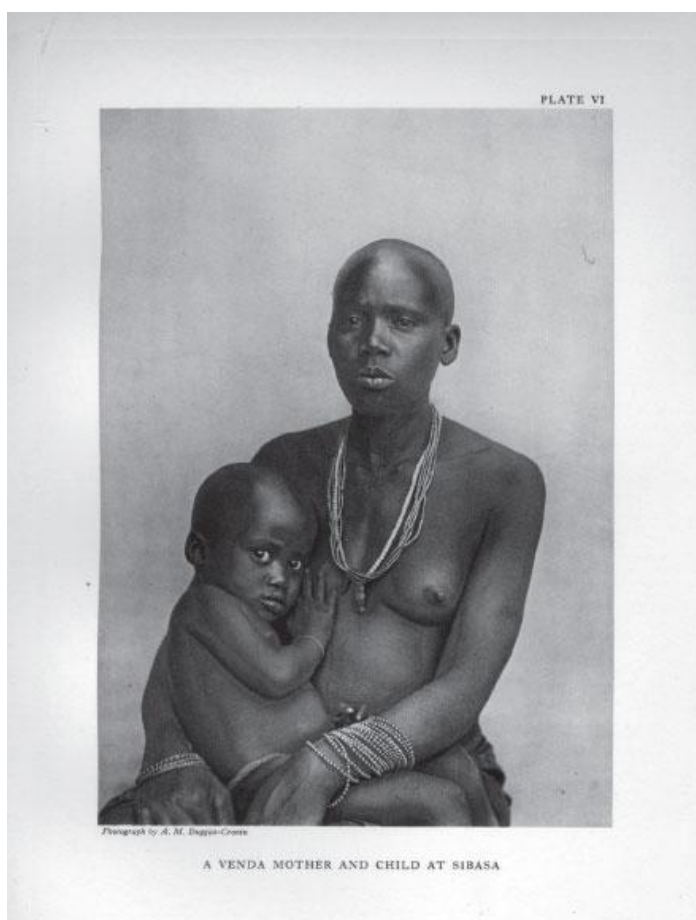


Figure 10: *The Bavana*, Plate VI, 'A Venda mother and child at Sibasa'.

Figure 4 A.M. Duggan-Cronin, Venda Mother and Child, c. 1928

Muholi's work is therefore at once both similar and different to that of European anthropologists like Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin working in southern Africa in the early 1900s. Art historian Michael Godby's paper looking at Duggan-Cronin's series *The Bantu*

Tribes of Africa, contextualises these photographs politically, anthropologically and aesthetically (Godby, 2010). Duggan-Cronin, born in Ireland in 1874, came to South Africa in 1897 where he was employed by De Beers in Kimberly. In 1904 he acquired his first camera, which he initially used to study mine workers. However, in 1928 he published *The Bavenda*, the first volume of *The Bantu Tribes of South Africa*, which contained many photographic portraits of the *Bavenda* people. One of particular interest to Godby is *Venda Mother and Child*, depicting a bare breasted woman with a child on her lap, the caption to this photograph identified the woman's features as 'aristocratic' which suggests an affiliation with physical anthropology that used facial types to categorize groups (Godby, 2010). Aside from this, Duggan-Cronin was known to supply items of dress, like lion skins, to his subjects, to provide a more 'authentic feel', in this way somehow fixing the primitivism of the people in the images. Duggan-Cronin's images were created with the voyeur in mind, for instance the composition of *Venda Mother and Child* can be compared to well-known European depictions of the Madonna and Child.

This was a time when Europeans were 'discovering' foreign lands, thus often subjecting indigenous people to their exploitative lenses. "Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, methods of describing and anthropologizing the body, such as craniometry and serology, were used as scientific to suggest that black people were less evolved than whites" (Lock Swarr, 2009: 526). Through these exploitive measures, sex organs were often viewed as markers of difference. Many of the photographs taken at this time can be viewed as ethnographic, anthropological or artistic, some photographs even bordering on pornography, exoticizing the African female body. According to Desiree Lewis, "the black female body is wholly charged by the normative meaning invested in whiteness and masculinity, and values and characteristics yielded by these signifiers," (2005: 12). Thus, many of the

anthropologically based representations of black females in Africa are framed by the context of male exploration, colonialism, the exotic, the study of the 'other'.

The female figure specifically became a predominant object in colonial photography, the photographic lens often trained on women's breasts and buttocks. Throughout colonialism and to a certain extent in contemporary discourse, Black women were systematically denied control over their bodies before the camera and under the law.

Henriette Gunkel, 2009.

A well-known example of the exploitation of the black female body, although before the advent of photography, is that of Saartjie (Sara) Baartman, given the name 'Hottentot Venus', who was exhibited in Paris and London from the year 1810 to 1815. According to Lock Swarr, "her objectification served to "educate" colonial observers in London and Paris to locate the boundaries of race in African women's bodies and provide scientists with gendered justification for racist hierarchies" (2009: 527). The emphasis placed on her genitals and buttocks helped to codify racial difference, 'normal' and abnormal bodies. Black female bodies therefore became "objects of classification, academic scrutiny and sexual fantasy" (Abrahams, 1997; cited in Lewis, 2011: 202).

While Muholi uses aspects of documentary photography in her work, it also has an activist agenda thus placing her work in a political realm. There are other South African artists who have a similar focus; for example, the work of Jean Brundrit, a contemporary lesbian South African art photographer and Fine Arts lecturer who has focused on lesbian identity and visibility in her work over the last twenty years. Gunkel (2009: 78) states that Brundrit's "work focuses mainly on the White lesbian community in Cape Town. She describes a particular comfort zone, a safe space that is often linked to the private sphere, which White lesbians to a certain extent inhabit". To a large extent the black lesbians

represented in Muholi's work lack this "comfort zone", and this makes the goals of Muholi's work somewhat different to that of Brundrit because of their respective social statuses, but this has not stopped them from working together on a workshop that gathered experiences of what it means to be lesbian in South Africa, in March/April 2007, in Johannesburg (Brundrit, 2010). Brundrit also has a political edge to her photography, as her bodies of work mainly focus on issues of identity and homosexuality, violence, gender and questioning stereotypes. Much like Muholi, Brundrit's lesbian identity comes through in her work, as she takes on lesbian concerns, highlighting these areas of discrimination through her photography (Josephy, 2004).

Muholi thus strongly questions the place of black women within art history and visual culture, through placing women's experiences such as menstruation, homosexuality and violence against their bodies in the public realm. What makes these representations of women's experiences even more controversial is that it is not the heterosexual body being shown but rather the queer abject body. The image being captured is not women's experience as men think it should be, but the real lived experience of women, in particular black lesbian women. The people in her photographs are often not afraid to show their faces and look straight at the viewer, which encourages a direct engagement with the images, this thus shows a type of agency on behalf of the photographer and photographed, asserting their places in the world – 'look at me, I exist'.

Being is an exploration of both our existence and our resistance as lesbians/women loving women, as black women living our intersecting identities in a country that claims equality for all within the LGBTI community, and beyond.

Zanele Muholi, 2007.

Muholi's images of lesbian women in loving relationships as depicted in the *Being* series (2007) brings into the public sphere what would have otherwise been kept private. In this way, Muholi's photography questions dominant representations of the normative that are often displayed in religious myths and traditions, the media, films, and photography, to name a few. The formation or visibility of 'new' sexual identities, such as those represented in Muholi's work, call into question 'old' or traditional ones. These images force one to question one's own identity and deeply instilled beliefs of what is acceptable and unacceptable. This then leads to the questioning of religious heteronormative belief systems, deeply rooted in patriarchal religious systems and ideologies, which inform society at large. The "modernisation of gender roles" (Gunkel 2010: 4) through the assertion of new sexual identities thus becomes problematic for many identities reliant on heteropatriarchy. Mikki van Zyl notes that "the sexual transformation issue is to what extent certain identities and practices 'threaten' competing hegemonic masculinities and femininities through contesting culturally established heteropatriarchal gender relations" (2009: 369).

In her projects, Muholi often confronts and questions traditional religious concepts and ideologies about immorality and what is acceptable, particularly in relation to sexuality within the South African Zulu-Christian context, and the ideologies, myths, symbols and practices it encompasses. Muholi realises the socialising effects of heteronormativity and patriarchy, and her images thus go against what is considered right or moral in a heteronormative sense. Ultimately Muholi has also been influenced by certain ideologies, which affects the photographs she produces and the way she portrays her subject matter, as well as influencing her need to create a black lesbian identity and history. For Muholi (2009), it is through showing the visual pleasures and erotica of her community that their collective beings come into focus and visibility, into community and national consciousness. Muholi's

activist photography thus brings new notions of identity, individually and collectively, which would otherwise have been ignored or silenced.

Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde – An Open Book

Stories of African people's lives, their beliefs, their rituals and meanings, have largely been told through the eyes and voices of European anthropologists, ethnographers and missionaries, during the age of exploration and later colonialism. But within the last few decades this has changed, African women and men have begun telling their own stories and writing about their own lives and cultures from first hand experience, negating the voyeuristic interpretations of the past. Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde forms part of this new tradition of narrative and autobiography. Through focussing on Nkabinde's autobiography, *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma* (2009), as well as the community based work she is engaged with; one is able to demonstrate why her approach to creating her identity is so important and different. Nkabinde's life experiences as a Zulu lesbian *sangoma*, has many dimensions. What led me to use Nkabinde as a case study is the way that she speaks about her religion and culture in relation to her sexuality. She is very open about her experiences and this facilitates analysis. Unlike Muholi's work, not much has been written about Nkabinde's autobiography within academic circles, and this leaves a lot yet to be explored and analysed in more detail and from different perspectives to fully understand its layers and meanings within the current South African context.

The history of literature, both fiction and non-fiction, by African authors post colonisation is very diverse. From those authors writing in exile to those in African countries, writing in

creative ways about the current circumstances they found themselves in at this time. In the main, representations of sexuality within these writings were restricted to that of heterosexual persuasions.¹ In the latter half of the twentieth century, up to the early nineties, where African authors did portray homosexual behaviour in novels, it was often “with different levels of pity or revulsion” (Epprecht, 2008: 138). Thus the sources of the fictional characters’ homosexual tendencies or sexual uncertainty in these novels were often portrayed as imports from Europe, the Arab world, or America. Thus “the struggle to remain or to become culturally and politically really African involved resisting that uncertainty, and by extension all else that appears to come from beyond Africa” (Epprecht, 2008: 139). Although Epprecht is speaking about fiction here, it does provide some sort of insight into the position of homosexuals within African society at this time. The prevalence of biographies and autobiographies by Africans who identified themselves as non-heterosexuals were virtually non-existent. Furthermore, placing same-sex intimacy “in the cities, in Europe, in prisons, and at the hands of slave traders and their descendents” in many of these novels, placed them outside of “authentic” Africa (Epprecht, 2008: 142).

Epprecht makes an important observation that “women as sexual dissidents or deviants are noticeably absent” in these novels, but this changed somewhat by the 1970s, when “African women also began for the first time to contribute to the discussion in a significant (internationally published) way” (Epprecht 2008: 142). African female authors showed daring literary initiative when they began to address lesbian themes in their writing. There was thus a “subtle recognition of African agency and sexual innovation” that came through in their novels (Epprecht, 2008: 143). Writing of sexual intimacy and pleasure between African women was in many ways “more threatening to hegemonic African masculinity than acknowledging situational male-male sex” (Epprecht, 2008: 143), as this

¹ However, Marc Epprecht in his book *Heterosexual Africa?* (2008) notes exceptions to this dominance of heterosexuality.

went against the definition of sexual intercourse as requiring the presence of a male, while at the same time going against the way that passive femininity had been imagined and portrayed. By the second half of the twentieth century, many African intellectuals also started questioning the validity of a pre-colonial heterosexual Africa that had no signs of same-sex intimacy (Epprecht 2008: 142). Attitudes toward homosexuality within African literature then slowly began to change, but it is not until the present twenty-first century that major strides in literature and narrative in the form of non-fiction, both by and about homosexuals in Africa, has become more prominent.

Many stories about lesbian lives “have been written, or rewritten, so as to conceal their real interests and motivations, in order to make them appear more acceptable to mainstream views and values, and less threatening to the status quo” (Diesel, 2011: xii). This has allowed for many narratives about lesbian lives to be left out of memory, knowledge and history. This is a big problem in the face of creating a lesbian identity, as these histories (or *her-stories*) could potentially form the foundation of lesbian identities. This is largely because literature in the form of biographies and autobiographies written by authors that are socially marginalised in various ways, sexuality being one, “constitutes the creation of an identity at odds with mainstream values” (Stobie, 2011: 151). In contemporary South Africa, and Africa as a whole, this has slowly begun to change. Importance is now being placed on depicting, in overt ways, “the fears, agonies, secrecy and joys of lesbian lives, providing the kind of understanding which brings an empathetic appreciation of alternative relationships, and their ability to provide enrichment and fulfilment for both partners” (Diesel, 2011: xii). By choosing to write an autobiography, Nkabinde has situated herself within this new kind of writing that affirms rather than shames lesbian identities. In doing this, however, she straddles both private and public spheres, holding her experiences up to public scrutiny.

“Accordingly, auto/biographical accounts can function as sites of governmentality that produce normalised subjectivities as well as practices that hold the promise of emancipation and autonomy” (Coullie, Meyer, Thengani, and Olver, 2006: 3).

According to Epprecht, the first book devoted to lesbian and gay writing in Africa was *The Invisible Ghetto* (Krous, 1993; cited in Epprecht 2008). This book had no fiction or poetry by black authors and “the stories as a whole still reflected the dominance of whites in the gay movement of the time, and the rarity or difficulties of forging interracial relationships” (Epprecht 2008: 145). When one compares this initial attempt at an anthology about homosexual lives in Africa, to that of more contemporary writings such as *Defiant Desire* (Gevisser and Cameron, 1995), *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives* (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005) and *Reclaiming the L-word* (Diesel, 2011), to name a few, it is clear that it has come a long way.

The anthology *Reclaiming the L-word: Sappho's Daughters out in Africa* (2011), in particular, comprises of many personal stories by South African lesbian women from different ethnicities and backgrounds. This is an example of autobiography that is now being produced to close the gap present in the documentation of lesbian history. Zanele Muholi, Leisl Theron, and Alleyn Diesel are a few of the contributors to the collection, each telling deeply personal stories. Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde thus forms part of this rise in creating awareness around South African lesbian lives, urging lesbians to tell their own stories and not have them defined and written by others' skewed views. Through her autobiographical accounts Nkabinde therefore has the ability to challenge hierarchies and give alternatives to them, and has the ability to mobilise collective action whether intentionally or not. In this way, auto/biographical accounts are often intertwined in struggles of justice (Coullie, Meyer, Thengani, and Olver, 2006: 2).

As stated in the first chapter, one of the first things that Nkabinde told Ruth Morgan, the Director of the Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA), when she met her in 2002 was that she wanted to write a book, to be remembered. This autobiographical book was first published in 2008, entitled *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma*, the first book-length autobiography by a lesbian *sangoma*. What makes this book different is the way that Nkabinde as a black South African woman rather fearlessly addresses issues of sexuality that are often subject to social taboos (Stobie, 2011: 151). This book documents Nkabinde's views on sexuality and the ancestors' influence over her sexuality, while also placing these experiences within the context of the cultural and political history of South Africa. The interviews that Nkabinde did with other same-sex *sangomas*, by working with Ruth Morgan at the GALA, informed her own writing and helped her to place herself within a broader community of same-sex *sangomas*. The interviews Nkabinde did later got published in a chapter that Nkabinde co-wrote with Morgan in the book *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives: Female Same-Sex Practices in Africa* (2005). Nkabinde places an emphasis on community, and describes "a strong need to be connected to other lesbian *sangomas*" (Nkabinde, 2009: 79), as for a long time she had felt isolated.

Boshadi Semenya notes that, through openly positioning herself as a lesbian *sangoma*, Nkabinde "is claiming a historical, cultural, political and even ideological set of experiences" (c.2008: 98). Born in the 1970s, Nkabinde shows how sexuality was and still is heavily tied up with politics, showing the influence of apartheid, the liberation movement and feminism throughout her autobiography. Nkabinde contextualises various aspects of her life within the complex history of South Africa, which informs her racial and class identities, as well as her gender identity as a black Zulu woman. Through her research work at GALA, as well as being a tour guide for the GALA Queer Tour and at Constitution Hill, Nkabinde has been

instrumental in showing and teaching people about the history of South Africa and the place that non-heterosexuals occupied within this history. Nkabinde's autobiography thus fits into larger narratives of the history of queer people and the broader history of South Africa, situating herself and her experiences within a collective context "embedded in social relations and struggles" (Coullie, Meyer, Thengani, and Olver, 2006: 4).

Each of my different roles, as a Zulu woman, as a lesbian and a sangoma, comes with its own challenges. Working at Constitution Hill gives me a high view. I can stand with my back to our apartheid history which is still alive in the Old Fort and the Women's Prison and see the Constitutional Court and be reminded of all that is good in our country; and I can stand on top of the hill outside the Constitutional Court and get an overview of Johannesburg. I can see the good and the bad of the city. This is what I try to do when I think about my own life. I try to take a look from a high place and see the good and the bad.

Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, 2009.

In a review of Nkabinde's autobiography, Semenya notes that "Nkabinde explores issues around sexual culture and sexual identity from the vantage points of an African cosmological framework and feminist epistemology" (c.2008: 97). Nkabinde thus acknowledges the cosmological framework encompassing Zulu ideologies and beliefs, and feminist epistemological understandings of the post-modern world that influences much of our reasoning today. Thus Nkabinde straddles the traditional and modern, in a sense, and this is evident in the way that Nkabinde describes herself as a "lesbian *sangoma*". The word "lesbian" being a relatively new term contrasts the deep roots of "*sangoma*" within various African cultures.

Nkabinde also blurs certain lines in relation to gender and sexuality. As a lesbian *sangoma*, she questions many stereotypes and assumptions that people may have about *sangomas* and Zulu tradition. In this context the ancestors play a very important role,

particularly Nkabinde's dominant ancestor Nkunzi a male patriarch. While Nkabinde identifies herself as lesbian, she acknowledges the influence of her dominant male ancestor over her sexual choices. She thus finds ways to express her sexuality while still holding onto her religion and culture and her calling as a *sangoma*. In this way, according to Stobie, Nkabinde's autobiography can be compared to that of Audre Lorde's biomythography *Zami: a new spelling of my name* (1982), in the way that it "refuses to privilege one aspect of her identity over another, and presents the reader with a range of complex, contradictory and fluid subjectivities" (Stobie 2011: 152). Through the medium of autobiography, Nkabinde has attempted to make sense of her life experiences and in this way has related "earlier to later selves", helping her come to terms with the many dimensions of her personal identity (Coullie, Meyer, Thengani, and Olver, 2006: 1-2).

Nkabinde's writing can also be compared to that of Bessie Head (1937-1986), a prominent South African born inter-racial writer whose "fiction highlights the plight of the socially marginalized in eccentric and seminal ways" while bearing "the potential to enrich debates on Africanism, feminism and womanism" (Rafapa, Nengome, Tshamano, 2011: 112). Head's struggle with her identity and issues of belonging as a child and young adult within South Africa during the years of apartheid is present in her writing, making her novels part autobiographic. Head's writing from the standpoint of a woman and an African "necessitates the hypothesis that she writes both as an African and a feminist" (Rafapa, Nengome, Tshamano, 2011: 113), and this can be likened to Nkabinde's position as a writer within contemporary South Africa.

In the conclusion to her article "*The Cardinals* and Bessie Head's Allegories of Self" (1996), Desiree Lewis makes some important observations about Head's writing in relation to the marginal subject, these observations can be linked to Nkabinde's projection of self within her autobiography. According to Lewis, Head's "fiction explores her characters' circuitous

defiance of identities imposed on them, *The Cardinals* ambiguously confronts the dominant texts that speak for and about a central female character” (Lewis, 1996: 77). Nkabinde, as the central figure in her autobiography, confronts similar issues in the way that she addresses dominant Zulu traditional beliefs about women and patriarchy, while finding ways to work within them and subverting them simultaneously as a lesbian *sangoma*. Both Nkabinde’s autobiography and Head’s *The Cardinals* thus illuminate the way that “master narratives shape the public domain of writing and the fictions available to marginal subjects” while revealing aspects of the subversion and reproduction of “dominant meanings and codes, struggling with a vision which available codes are not able to sustain” (Lewis, 1996: 77). Both authors, although writing at different times in South African history, therefore reveal “struggles both against and with available narratives, forms, and discourses” (Lewis, 1996: 77) in relation to the creative construction of their identities through writing.

One can view Nkabinde’s autobiography and community work as part of the collective struggle of black lesbians and their emancipation. She entwines her own narrative into broader narratives that she associates with, one being that of black lesbian *sangomas*. Nkabinde explores the way that being a lesbian and *sangoma* is integrated into various parts of her life, while simultaneously looking at the way her life is integrated with others that she has had contact with. Nkabinde’s individual troubles represented in her writing therefore relates to the broader struggles of her community and nation.

Conclusion

Ignorance of one's past inhibits an ability to grasp or learn from experience, and so to be enabled to make informed decisions about the future. This tends to suppress the knowledge and motivation needed to change a pernicious and damaging situation to allow for a full flourishing of one's humanity.

Alleyn Diesel, 2011.

Both Muholi and Nkabinde aim to fight this ignorance about lesbian identities that has had a stronghold over many people, largely due to heteronormative modes of making sense of the world and one's humanity. It is evident that Muholi and Nkabinde have various common aims although the way they address these aims is somewhat different. Both Muholi and Nkabinde feel that their roles have been approved by their ancestors, a higher power that gives them a justified sense of purpose. However, the ancestors and the supposed heterosexualized cultures of Africa have also been used to justify certain representations and discourses about sexuality that have become normalised, and that place lesbian bodies as abject bodies in the public sphere, as shown by Muholi's photography. Nkabinde's position as a lesbian *sangoma* also emphasizes the role of the ancestors and Zulu religion in upholding certain hetero-patriarchal modes of being in the world, which ultimately influences how she approaches her sexual choices.

Muholi and Nkabinde express a strong yearning to be remembered and to create documents that will form part of future memory and history. This shows that they understand the importance that this acknowledgement of black lesbian existence has in addressing their marginality and invisibility, while also creating and sustaining lesbian identity within the South African context. Muholi and Nkabinde are thus advocating for the rights of lesbians, they realise that without a history the future of many lesbians "will continue to be lost, denied, trivialized, and otherwise damaged" (Cottingham 1996: 75).

By delving into the lives and work of Muholi and Nkabinde this chapter has shown why and how they are exceptional in their use of agency and how both Muholi and Nkabinde

facilitate a better understanding of how to approach the creation of a black lesbian identity. Through their various modes of asserting queer identities, heteronormative identities are being questioned. Muholi and Nkabinde thus provide a rich source of information about the varying obstacles that black lesbians face and how diverse their experiences are.

The spheres of gender and sexuality, literature, art and religion are intertwined and therefore inform each other in meaningful ways. Hoffman (1996) asserts in her epilogue that “it is the artist’s and the media’s vision and voice that have articulated some of these images of the mind and of the heart, images that can be seen either as mirrors or as lamps for ourselves and our families, depending on the time and circumstances. As mirrors, the images may reflect, in clear as well as distorted ways, a sense of self, family, and culture. As lamps, they may light a new path and help shape and articulate a new sense of identity, individually and collectively” (236). Muholi’s photography and Nkabinde’s narrative are both mirrors and lamps in this sense, as they reflect on the current place of black lesbians in South Africa, as well as light the way for a new sense of identity and community for black lesbians.

The following chapter contextualises the contemporary need to create a black lesbian identity and demonstrates how expressions and definitions of sexuality and gender within the South African and broader African context have shifted over time. I do this by analyzing Lulu Xingwana’s description of the Innovative Women Exhibition as “immoral, offensive and going against nation-building”, using her description to interrogate certain conceptions of sexuality that are present in contemporary South Africa. There is thus a focus on historical perspectives on African sexuality, how the idea of same-sex intimacy as immoral has been fostered and justified over time, and how all this comes together, often feeding political agendas.

CHAPTER THREE

Fantasies of a Heterosexual Africa

As presented in the introductory chapter, after the Innovative Women exhibition in 2010, then Arts and Culture minister Lulu Xingwana stated that the exhibition, and particularly the work of Zanele Muholi, expressed the opposite of social cohesion and nation building, going as far as labelling the exhibition as “immoral, offensive and going against nation-building.” This chapter analyses this description by Xingwana attempting to answer questions of what informs this understanding of morality, the nation and social cohesion, and why it is that in a country like South Africa, which fought so hard against discrimination in any form, is this still occurring. In this chapter I use Xingwana’s description of Muholi’s art at the Innovative Women Exhibition to interrogate certain dominant conceptions of sexuality that are present in contemporary South Africa. This description is a product of prominent homogenising understandings of sexuality that often fosters resistance against lesbians in the form of hate speech, homophobia and hate crimes.

Firstly, this chapter briefly outlines the progression of queer rights in South Africa, before examining historical perspectives on African sexuality and how these have been impacted by western/European colonial influences. Secondly, it looks at how the idea of same-sex intimacy as immoral has been fostered and justified over time. Finally, I analyse how this crystallizes in the contemporary South African and broader African context, feeding specific political agendas. This chapter thus serves an important purpose of contextualising the contemporary need to create a black lesbian identity in South Africa. Expressions and definitions of sexuality and gender as we may now understand it in South Africa have shifted over time. For instance, the presence of same-sex relationships and intimacy between women

on the African continent has been denied by colonial researchers, and more recently politicians and religious authorities. But as studies have shown these relationships have existed for many years in varying circumstances, such as ‘mummy-baby’ relationships and ‘women marriages’ (Wieringa and Morgan, 2005; Gunkel 2010; Morgan and Reid, 2003). But these relationships are often overlooked or misrepresented to favour heterosexualized norms where men play dominant roles and women’s sexual purity is emphasized. This, coupled with colonial restrictions on certain African customs and traditions that may have fostered these types of same-sex relationships, foreground issues of secrecy, power, racism, exoticism, domination and oppression that all play a part in illustrating the contemporary understandings of normative sexuality today. To better understand current negotiations of black lesbian identities and the related impact of religious and cultural ideologies, this background is integral.

One of the aims of this thesis is to show that African women are not just victims - of colonialism, apartheid, gender-based violence, structural oppression and poverty - and cannot be viewed as a homogenous group. This adds to the efforts of many other African feminists to move away from victimizing discourses of African women projected by many feminist, colonialist, and masculinised accounts over time. This challenges the way that agency has been defined by some Western feminists while at the same time using certain strategies developed by Western feminists to show the power of female agency and the diversity of forms that it takes in different contexts. However, there is still a strong need to correct a distortion in the narratives concerning African sexuality that influence thought and belief today, as debates are largely in academia and do not reach people on the ground.

On the Surface

As noted earlier, the South African context is one that has been moulded by the effects of western imperialism, apartheid, and the amalgamation of different cultures and religions, much like the rest of Africa. The prevalence of social movements fighting for human rights and equality, such as feminism and the black liberation movement, also played a major role in forming the country we have today. In order to frame the integration of queer rights into the present liberal Constitution, I briefly look at aspects of South Africa's post-colonial history. Although, it seems at first glance that much has been achieved in a short period of time, this is often not the case for many black lesbians, particularly within rural and urban township settings.

The 1980s saw the emergence of a politics of non-racialism in gay and lesbian groups and the emergence of black-led organisations, such as the Gay and Lesbian Organization of the Witwatersrand (GLOW). This was the period in which lesbian and gay groups made formal contact with the liberation struggle, internally through affiliation with the United Democratic Front and externally through the exiled leadership of the African National Congress.

Ruth Morgan and Graeme Reid, 2003.

The late 1960s was when the origins of a formal gay and lesbian movement began in South Africa, lobbying for legislative reform (Morgan and Reid, 2003: 376). In the 1970s-80s, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and intersexed (LGBTI) South Africans were among the many human rights activists fighting for equality and freedom from oppression and discrimination. Many faced exposure and punishment for making themselves and their prerogatives known in the public sphere during the apartheid regime. At this time, much of the activism for the rights of homosexuals was divided along racial lines, the repercussions of

which are still visible today, with gay visibility mostly being white and cosmopolitan in South Africa.²

1990 brought a widespread reconstruction of previous positions on same-sex intimacy by the South African government, and was also the year of the first Gay Pride March in Johannesburg. During the apartheid regime, homosexual conduct between men was considered a crime, if found guilty of this one could serve up to seven years in prison, notwithstanding the public humiliation that came with one's "exposure" as a gay individual. This criminalisation of homosexuality was linked to the criminalisation of sodomy and the Immorality Amendment Act (1969). During this time "same-sex sexuality had been criminalised, pathologised and forced underground," (Cameron, 2006: 4). Conservative social attitudes among different cultures in South Africa had been traditionally against homosexuality and this still persists today. In 1994, along with the ushering in of the end of apartheid, a new democracy and the ideal of a rainbow nation, male same-sex conduct was legalised in South Africa. This may be considered as the first tangible step toward a more gay inclusive Constitution post-apartheid. Female same-sex intimacy, however, having never been illegal but still wrapped in a veil of silence, continued to operate under the radar as a sexual orientation for women, much like in the past.

In 1996, the new South African Constitution was the first in the world to include sexual orientation as a protected category. This achievement is framed by the history of lesbian and gay politics in South Africa where, unlike the queer movements in "North America and Western Europe, South Africa's unique political history meant that gay and lesbian issues have been included in a broader agenda for liberation," (Morgan and Reid, 2003: 376). This disallowed discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual orientation, among others. On paper all genders and sexualities have the same rights and South Africa is

² Elaborated on in chapter five.

revered as one of the most 'gay friendly' destinations in the world. The 1998 Employment Equity Act, protecting South Africans from labour discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation, further established South Africa's 'gay friendly' status. Most recently, South Africa became the first country in Africa to legalise same-sex civil marriage in 2006, this also made it only the fifth country in the world to do so. Currently, however, there is still inconsistency when these laws and rights need to be implemented, as issues of religion, race and class often filter into their implementation in the ground. This creates tension between the ideals of the constitution and, in the case of civil same-sex marriage, many cultural and religious institutions that reinforce the sanctity of the heterosexual bond. Therefore, on the surface all seems well for queer people in South Africa, but this does not represent the full picture.

South Africa is thus unique in the region in terms of a progressive legislative framework protecting the rights of lesbians and gay men. This was achieved through inclusion, rather than exclusion, from the national liberation struggle. Yet regional debates about culture and tradition in relation to homosexuality continue to resonate.

Ruth Morgan and Graeme Reid, 2003

Myth of Same-sex Practices as un-African

Perhaps the earliest written records of studies on African sexualities were those archived from colonial explorers and missionaries who traversed the continent in the latter half of the 19th century. During this period of imperial expansion and colonisation, African bodies and sexualities became focal points for justifying and legitimising the fundamental objectives of colonialism: to civilise the barbarian and savage natives of the 'dark continent' (McClintock 1995; Young 1995).

Sylvia Tamale, 2011.

African sexuality has for many years been defined through the eyes and language of colonialists. Historical writings authored by white male explorers show a “pattern of the ethnocentric and racist construction of African sexualities” (Tamale, 2011: 15), often imbued with evolutionist thought that project essentialist views of African men and women. From their first visits to Africa, European researchers had a “voyeuristic, ethnopornographic obsession” with African sexuality and sexual cultures (Tamale, 2011: 19). The ‘othering’ of African cultures and sexualities, which labelled them inferior to the West, often served as justification for the racist regimes of imperialists. Scientific theories such as evolutionism established “the highest level of ‘civilisation’ as that attained by Europeans, legitimising efforts of missionaries and colonisers to ‘civilise’ African peoples” (Cornwall, 2005: 2). This has for the past two centuries allowed for Christian-centric European understandings of the nature of sexuality, morality and sin to be imposed on Africa (Reid and Walker, 2005: 186). This understanding of morality and sin that is fuelled by Christianity and the Bible is still prominent today within many African cultures. South African president Jacob Zuma demonstrates this hybrid of traditional hetero-patriarchal Zulu and Christian beliefs in his day to day life, being a supporter of polygamy while being known to disapprove of same-sex relationships and abortion (Gunkel, 2010: 47-8).

According to Desiree Lewis (2011: 200), to explore African sexualities carefully requires “a way of both acknowledging and analysing how others have historically been imagined.” The legacy of colonialism feeds heavily into this imagining and the knowledge production that it fostered. Lewis asserts that because of the uncivilised and less than human nature of Africans through the eyes of colonialists, the assumption was that Africans had to be heterosexual. She cites Busangokwakhe Dlamini (2006: 132) to justify this assertion, because the African man “was perceived to be close to nature, ruled by instincts, and culturally unsophisticated, he had to be heterosexual; his sexual energies and outlets devoted

exclusively to their “natural” purpose – biological reproduction” (Lewis, 2011: 207). Heteronormative projections by Europeans onto the sexuality and nature of Africans can be surmised as inherently homophobic in its denial of diversity within the relationships between African people. This calls for more nuanced representations than those presented by the majority of colonial anthropologists and twentieth century feminists (Cornwall, 2005).

While homosexuality was regarded as something perverse, according to colonialists, homoerotic desires and agencies were associated with sophisticated human desires that Africans could not possess because of their supposed primitive nature. Many European researchers identified African sexuality as exclusively ‘heterosexual’, claiming that sexual ‘perversions’ such as homosexuality may only exist “within overdeveloped European cultures” (Gunkel, 2010: 42). So although colonialists may not have approved of same-sex relationships in their cultures, recognising that it existed in their own culture and denying that it existed in African cultures aided their racist evolutionist reasoning and fostered their imagining of the racialized ‘other’. Graeme Reid and Liz Walker further this observation when stating that “the image of polymorphous perversity embodied in the virile and promiscuous African man and the primary object of his desires, the subordinate, child bearing African woman are familiar tropes that announce the African sexual subject as quintessentially other” (Reid and Walker, 2005: 186). Thus, African sexuality was represented in strong contrast to European sexuality, and the history and study of African sexuality has for more than two centuries been largely documented through racist and political lenses.

Historically, within scholarship, there is a silence surrounding the sexualities of African women, and where it is mentioned there is a focus on the role of reproduction and motherhood as defining characteristics of their sexuality. Heterosexual families were

presented as normative in Africa by European ‘experts’. African women’s sexualities were also placed in opposition to European standards and norms of sex and beauty, and were labelled ‘primitive’ and looked down upon by imperialists. “Clearly, the depictions by Europeans of African women as insatiable, amoral, barbaric beings said more about the fears, fantasies and preoccupations with sexuality of the former than anything else” (Tamale, 2011: 15). These accounts of African women’s sexuality seem to overshadow any other accounts of sexuality that could exist, making these depictions seem normative even to the present. Thus, “same-sex relations in Africa have either been largely ignored or concealed in inaccessible texts such as travel writings, missionary reports and obscure anthropological journals,” (Reid and Walker, 2005: 187).

The main focuses of public health researchers during the colonial era were disease, pregnancy prevention and curbing sexual excesses and perversions. The narrow approach meant that the research by biomedical, epidemiologists and demographers ignored (and still does in the main) sexual wellness issues of eroticism and desire, leading to limited theoretical framings of African sexualities (Undie and Benaya 2006).

Sylvia Tamale, 2011.

Tamale notes that prior to the 1990s studies on the positive aspects of African sexualities were missing from scholarship and the history books. The spike in current research pertaining to women’s agency, pleasure, eroticism and desire in Africa attempts to redress this gap in literature. Reid and Walker support this observation by noting that “political change in South Africa has coincided with an upsurge in work on same-sex identities” in the social sciences that examines the “interplay between gender, sexuality and identity” (Reid and Walker, 2005: 187). Scholars of sexuality have disrupted assumptions of heteronormativity by addressing the “complexities of same-sex relationships in mines, prisons, gangs, and boarding schools and the roles lesbians and gays played in South African politics” (Lock Swarr, 2009: 526).

And this new research presents an opportunity for the myth of same-sex practices as unAfrican to be expelled, placing emphasis on the fluidity of sexualities in Africa.

For instance, in the case of female same-sex intimacy, Schapera in 1940 (as cited in Morgan and Reid, 2003) describes close friendships between African women that includes sleeping together and homosexual play, in his book *Married Life in an African Tribe*. While Saskia Wieringa, in her review of female same-sex intimacy in *Tommy Boys, Lesbian Men and Ancestral Wives*, notes that contemporary western notions of homosexuality are “far removed from the life of the Lovedu rain queen with her hundreds of wives, or that of an early twentieth century female-husbands among the Nuer in Sudan, Nandi in Kenya, Igbo in Nigeria or Fon in Dahomey (present-day Benin)” (2005: 281). Within these relationships, such as female-husbands, women with cultural and economic standing were able to acquire wives and take up the role of husband, while in many cases still acting as a wife to their own husbands, and in this way traversing certain fixed gender role boundaries.

In a similar light “women in women marriages had full rights as citizens of their communities before colonial powers intervened and introduced their own Victorian norms and legal apparatus” (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005: 18). ‘Women marriages’ occur in more than forty different societies in Africa. The majority of the accounts on ‘women marriages’ have been recorded through the biased lenses of western anthropologists, but this has begun to change with many African scholars attempting to rewrite the history books to provide a more balanced picture (Gunkel, 2010: 126). These marriages provide “an ambivalent space that women with same-sex desire can inhabit” (Morgan and Reid, 2003: 379), and can be found in Zulu, Venda, Pedi and Sotho cultures, to name a few. What is important to note here is that these ‘women marriages’ do not, in the main, disrupt the gender hierarchy or order that rests on patriarchy, and the sexual nature of these relationships are often denied. This is what makes them different from openly lesbian relationships that are often deemed immoral.

Judith Gay (1985) and more recently Limakatso Kendall (1998), as cited by Henriette Gunkel (2010), have written about ‘mummy-baby’ relationships between older and younger girls that have commonly developed in boarding schools and other female homosocial spaces in Lesotho, Swaziland, Kenya and South Africa. The older woman in the ‘mummy’ role takes care of the ‘baby’s’ (younger woman) needs, supporting the ‘baby’ emotionally and economically, also offering her protection, the relationship thus tends to mimic a mother-daughter relationship in many ways (Gunkel, 2010: 118-119). While these “relationships are set up as a form of kinship through intimacy,” they also provide the opportunity for turning into an intimacy that is understood as sexual, with sexual intimacy becoming an aspect in many of these relationships (Gunkel, 2010: 120). Because this form of intimacy is situated in the private sphere, ‘mummy-baby’ relationships are not subjected to fixed categories of sexual identity, such as ‘lesbian’, allowing the women within these relationships to have a more fluid sexual identity that does not stop them from having intimate relationships with men. This also means that the women involved in these ‘mummy-baby’ relationships are not a threat to the heteronormative gender regime (Gunkel, 2010: 122).

Within many forms of female same-sex relationships that have existed in Africa, sexual relations between the women are viewed as taboo, as these conceptions of sexual intimacy have been tied up in the definition of sex as requiring a penis. According to Wieringa (2005), often female intimacy has not been seen as sexual because there is no penetrative sex involved, and this has caused many erotic aspects of these relationships to be overlooked, with researchers often stating that there was no sex between partners. Also, as shown in the preceding paragraphs, superimposing the western notion of exclusively adopting a same-sex orientation, such as lesbian, is problematic as these “forms of female same-sex intimacy are threatened by the emergence of a Western metropolitan standard of gender organization,” (Gunkel, 2010: 133).

These accounts of same-sex intimacy are therefore at odds with many post-colonial Western feminist “gender myths” pertaining to African women that often invoke “powerful social imaginaries that capture a longing equally rooted in Western feminist experience: the possibilities of combining motherhood with career, autonomy with connectedness,” (Cornwall, 2005: 2). Superimposing these western feminist goals onto the African context has the potential to restrict analysis of alternative ways that African women may achieve their own goals and exercise autonomy and resistance. Representations of African women’s sexuality and gender have thus not just been influenced by colonialism and apartheid but by western feminism as well, all providing somewhat jaded representations fuelled by their own prerogatives, whether directly or indirectly. Often the bias of western feminists has been displayed in their sensationalist representations of difference that has often led to customs associated with sexuality to appear decontextualized and generalized (Lazreg, 2005: 70). This has led many Third World feminists to stress the way that issues of gender and sexuality are always tied up with other interwoven axes of difference (Gunkel, 2010: 13), such as race, culture, class, ethnicity, time and place. In the main, feminist theory, especially in relation to “identity, sexuality, and difference, has not been formulated in ways that are wholly adequate and appropriate for African, “Third World” women’s lives and literature” (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005: 260).

The term ‘feminism’ prior to the 1990s, was used by relatively few African women, as it was associated with extreme individualism, opposition to patriarchy, and hostility to males (Mikell, 1995: 406). This is especially relevant in that in many parts of Africa, feminism still has a strong association with lesbianism, whiteness and man-hating, often leading many African women to denounce it (Rafapa, Nengome, Tshamano. 2011: 114). Because of this distancing, numerous African women thus view themselves as part of ‘women’s movements’ rather than feminists. This has, however, begun to change in recent

years, with the feminist movement having a relatively strong footing, particularly in South Africa, where “women’s movements, both among blacks and whites, have been instrumental in raising women’s issues” (Aronson, 2012: 4). When interrogating a concept such as feminism, one has to acknowledge that women’s identities shape their interests, and their interests in turn are formed within cultural, political and structural contexts, and these interests inform mobilization (Ray and Korteweg, 52). So, although “there is no consensus on what African feminism is” this “justifies the continued pursuit to find as many examples of it as possible in order to refine its definition” (Rafapa, Nengome, Tshamano, 2011: 113). Muholi and Nkabinde thus form part of this current refining of African feminism.

All these dynamics at play have to be taken into consideration when analysing gender in Africa, and South Africa in particular. Assumptions that have pervaded scholarship on gender and sexuality in Africa are now being challenged by contemporary African women who often urge “caution about the dangers of reading African worlds through western eyes” (Cornwall, 2005: 3). Representations of African women such as that of the “voiceless victim” are thus being transformed by women such as Zanele Muholi and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde who choose to tell these stories and make African women’s voices heard, changing history into *her-story*.

Immoral and Offensive

During the colonial period, European missionaries and colonialists had a profound affect on normative understandings of religion, culture and sexuality. Christianity and its ideologies were widely spread and highly influential. This is evident today with the prominence of

various African Christian churches, such as the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) and Isaiah Shembe's Nazareth Baptist Church, that are a hybrid of different African traditional beliefs and Christian dogma. Gender and religion are interrelated in people's perceptions of themselves and others, and this relationship is shaped by and deeply rooted in "culturally shared religious and philosophical heritage" (King, 1995: 2). In contemporary South Africa this "culturally shared religious and philosophical heritage" often aids negative attitudes toward homosexuality that still pervade certain ideologies, as people do not acknowledge same-sex intimacy as part of African culture, and due to the influence of Christianity it is regarded as sinful. There are also varying conceptions of morality and ethics within the African context, although common themes do occur in scholarship about African thought and philosophy. In light of these common themes, the importance of community, kinship and ancestors are often prioritized.

What lies behind the conception of moral 'good' or 'evil', is ultimately the nature of the relationship between individuals in a given community or society. There is almost no 'secret sin': something or someone is 'bad' or 'good' according to their outward conduct. A person is not inherently 'good' or 'evil', but he acts in ways which are 'good' when they conform to the customs and regulations of his community, or 'bad' when they do not.

John S. Mbiti, 1989.

This view of African thought presented by Mbiti emphasizes the place that one's position and conduct within community occupies. Conforming to the customs and regulations of a community has religious and moral significance. Because heterosexuality is often such a deeply imbedded cultural norm, non-heterosexuals often experience legal, social, cultural and religious alienation (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010: 8). Zanele Muholi demonstrates this when she observes that within African culture, particularly Zulu tradition, there are expectations that women should marry and procreate with a male partner who is to

be “the head of the family” thus adhering to specific constructions of femininity and masculinity. When self-identified lesbian women do not conform to this ideal, they are perceived as deviants who deserve punishment to make them into real or true African women that know their place within their community (Muholi, 2009: 19).

There is danger in portraying morality in African thought as homogeneous and in this way “continuing the colonial fixing of concepts of the indigenous” (Nel, 2008: 34). As noted earlier, varying contexts and influences come into play, for instance when a female *sangoma* takes an ancestral wife to help her in her duties as a traditional healer, it is not seen as immoral, but rather ordained by the ancestor who has chosen the wife for her (Reid and Morgan 2003, Nkabinde 2009). However, other forms of same-sex relationships that are not linked to such cultural justification may be looked down upon and even punishable.

Many twentieth-century textbooks on African religion, much like those on African sexuality, use western (colonial) interpretations of myths and rituals as modes of reference, which represent these as static rather than fluid and constantly adapting to new contexts. Awareness of the shortcomings of these approaches is valuable when researching this area of scholarship. For instance, the Reed Dance in Zulu culture, now a prominent tourist attraction, started as a validation of the Zulu king, symbolising the “ritual unity of a Zulu nation that is embodied in the ritual purity of young women” (Chidester, 2012: 132). In this light, national unity depended on sexual purity, particularly the sexual purity of young women in the form of virginity. Today, these symbolisations are also tied up with current issues of AIDS, sexuality and power that give new meanings to the concept of purity, showing how rituals can adapt to different circumstances.

Also, within the generalised African context, religion is not separate from culture and thought – it is integrated into various aspects of life, and has many structural implications. Unlike Abrahamic religions, African religion is not governed by a universal text or doctrine.

It is commonly accepted that African thought is part of broader cosmology that links the environment, society and the spiritual, and “all activities are informed by this holistic understanding so that they singularly or collectively maintain or transform the socio-cultural and spiritual landscape” (Nel, 2008: 37-8). This ideology that emphasizes the collective rather than the individual has many implications when it comes to same-sex practices, especially when these practices are associated with ‘negative’ connotations attached to homosexuality, such as that it encourages individuality, selfishness and promiscuity. This justifies the assumption that for same-sex intimacy to be accepted it has to fit in with the broader environmental, societal and spiritual landscape, as all acts have consequences for the whole community. Keeping up this illusion that homosexuals are inherently bad and do not contribute to the wellbeing of society as a whole – either by not forming heterosexual families, not having children, or spreading disease through their promiscuous behaviour – facilitates their marginalisation. From an American perspective, Ann Ferguson adds to this observation:

Hence homosexuals are a problem, and a bad example to heterosexuals of a lifestyle portrayed as not fully mature, as pleasure seeking and obligation free. Rather than meeting the obligations to produce and care for the future generation, they are seen as those who break or undermine responsible heterosexual marriages.

Ann Ferguson, 2007.

This shows how certain conceptions that people develop about homosexuals are often grounded by the supposed needs of the society, community or nation, and religious reasoning linked to patriarchy is often behind these conceptions. Religious justification of homosexuality as immoral is thus difficult to debate as it is based on people’s faith and beliefs which feed into widespread and entrenched ideologies that they live their lives by (Ferguson, 2007: 47). This therefore leaves little room for the negotiation and acceptance of

homosexuality in many societies. French feminist Luce Irigaray asserts that “men often organize their religious conscience around respect for laws that God or his ministers have set down for the faithful of a tradition. These laws correspond to an internalised construct, a ‘moral law’ inscribed, or to be inscribed, on the heart, dictating how to behave towards God, towards oneself, and towards others,” (2004: 174). In many communities, religious ideologies have a lot to do with the way that the heterosexual male maintains his power through certain “moral laws,” rituals, myths and symbols. For example, in the broad African context, an important role of marriage and procreation is part of the process of “becoming,” which often work to make male dominance normative. Realities that are perceived as deviant from these dominant norms, such as that of same-sex relationships, are more often than not forced into silence for fear of being ‘othered’ and this in turn helps maintain the status quo. This then is reinforced by the widespread writings of many male scholars that put forth androcentric presuppositions that cause “deficiencies at the level of data gathering, model building and theorizing in religious studies” (King, 1995: 2).

Within the contemporary Zulu South African context, denouncing homosexuality as unAfrican is often linked to a specific Western conceptualisation of homosexuality that has many negative connotations of not conforming to certain ingrained societal structures. This then poses a threat to embedded hetero-patriarchal ideologies, influenced by traditional Zulu beliefs as well as Christianity. A pertinent point to make here is that, in the main, same-sex practices that did exist in African contexts before colonisation were not public, but rather linked to the private sphere and linked to the ancestors, and integrated into the broader cosmological scheme. This is unlike the largely visible portrayal of homosexuality that emphasizes autonomy that is present in the contemporary South African context. This,

coupled with colonial writings renouncing homosexuality as something present in Africa before colonial expansion, constructs an ideological front that becomes difficult to contest.

The Reality

Lulu Xingwana's reaction at the Innovative Women exhibition (2010) gives insight into the current climate faced by black lesbians (among other sexualities) wanting to express their agency in relation to their gender and sexuality. Although "South Africa's Constitution and legislative framework protects the rights of lesbians and gay men, the idea that homosexuality is un-African and un-Christian is echoed in everyday life, especially by certain political organizations and religious groups," (Morgan and Reid, 2003: 377). What is evident in the contemporary South African context is that even with a progressive Constitution, there are still many people and institutions that do not agree with non-heterosexual lifestyles and pose a threat to the ideal that the Constitution stands for. This can also be related to the fact that our liberal constitution, much like Christianity, feminism, and homosexuality, can be viewed as an import from the West.

The "supposed absence of homosexuality" as truly African is often politically fuelled and has consequences with regards to contemporary expressions of homophobia through hate speech and hate crime that manifest on a daily basis. This notion persists despite many documented occurrences of same-sex practices within specific African religious and cultural contexts. As noted earlier, Morgan observes that same-sex intimacy between women in Africa in the form of "different types of female friendships and women marriages" have existed even before colonial powers intervened in the continent (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005: 17). However, current African political leaders who use the term 'unAfrican' to describe

same-sex intimacy further the fantasy of a heterosexual Africa. The term ‘unAfrican’ has been used by African political leaders such as Robert Mugabe, Sam Nujoma and our own Jacob Zuma to assert some sort of ‘authentic Africanness’ devoid of homosexuals, reinforcing colonialists’ observations about African sexualities. This then projects an illusion that same-sex practices have come from somewhere outside of a previously untouched Africa. Remarks by certain leaders that are often stated in a political context at public events tend to appeal to homogenised traditional African values that emphasize certain conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and a rejection of homosexuality as a perversion from the West (Morgan and Reid, 2003).

A very public example of this is when on Heritage day in 2006, then vice-president Jacob Zuma showed his disapproval of homosexuals through public hate speech. He described same-sex marriages as a “disgrace to the nation and God” and at a later stage made a public apology for what he had said, after much attention and uproar from the queer community. The public and highly politicised discourse on sexuality reiterates dominant sexual norms and homophobia as implicit to the national identity. Both Zuma’s and Xingwana’s comments demonstrate this when making reference to the nation and social cohesion within the South African context. This ultimately implies that black lesbians do not facilitate these aims and do not form part of a broader understanding of what the nation encompasses. If the African community is perceived as placing importance on lineage, family structures and offspring, clan names and ancestors, lesbians then come across as disrupting this structure and as not looking out for the good of the community or nation. A disinclination toward or intolerance of homosexuals and same-sex intimacy is thus depicted as part of the character of an ideal African that is committed to social cohesion and nation-building, and who adheres to an African ethos. The view of homosexuality as unAfrican is also used by political leaders to justify employing structural violence to regulate these so-called deviant

sexualities, as can currently be seen in countries such as Zimbabwe and Kenya where homosexuality is criminalised. As such homophobia is institutionalized by the state apparatus in violent ways. Although homosexuality is not criminalised in South Africa, there is still underlying discrimination present in many spheres.³

Hate crimes and homophobia against black lesbians can be viewed against the backdrop of persisting gender violence against women in South Africa. There is a need for women to adhere to certain understandings of femininity in the private and public sphere, femininities that work to uphold dominant masculinities. To demonstrate the reality of many black lesbians within the contemporary South African context the prevalence of hate crimes needs to be a key focus. Henriette Gunkel (2010) and Zanele Muholi both draw from the 2006 rape and murder of nineteen year old Zoliswa Nkonyana, who was stoned to death by about twenty men for being open about her sexuality in her township of Khayelitsha, in the Western Cape. Nkonyana's murder trial finally ended on 1 February 2012, six years after her murder. Out of the group of twenty young men who participated in her death, only 9 men were charged, and at the end only four of those men were charged with eighteen years imprisonment for her death (Bregman and Peter, 2012). Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde also describes the brutal rape and murder of her lesbian activist friend Sizakele Sigaza and her partner Salome Masooa in 2007, whose murderers were never prosecuted. These are just two cases out of a growing number of black lesbians who have been raped and murdered in South African communities, for which little justice has been attained, forcing women to remain silent about and deny expression of their sexual orientation and agency as human beings, fearing for their lives.

³ As will be addressed in chapter four.

These instances of homophobia in the form of gender based violence have been plaguing South African communities. The following chapter interrogates why lesbophobia is such a prominent phenomenon in a country that has provided equal rights to people of all genders and sexualities for the past sixteen years and in 2006 legalised same-sex marriages. A significant factor in this social crisis relates to the production and performance of heterosexist masculinities that, amongst other things, draw on patriarchal readings of Zulu and Christian traditions.

Conclusion

This chapter, through analyzing the description by Xingwana, gave some insight into what has informed certain understandings of morality, the nation and social cohesion, whether directly or indirectly. Xingwana's comments were put into the broader context of discourses about sexuality within Africa, framed by colonial writings about African sexuality, understandings of immorality as framed by certain religious and cultural ideologies, and the recent history of South Africa from the legacy of apartheid to the legalisation of gay marriages. All of these have had an influence on the current debates and views on 'deviant' sexualities.

It is thus clear that there are definite social tensions in the negotiation of black lesbian identities despite all the progress in the form of human rights that has been made in South Africa with regards to the progressive Constitution and queer rights activism. As elaborated in the next chapter, there are still certain institutions, ideologies, political and religious leaders that make the acceptance of queer identities a difficult task. Black lesbians are therefore in need of strategies and tools that allow them to express their sexuality in

whichever context they find themselves in, while helping them to combat and change the patriarchal and heteronormative ideologies that presently facilitate their oppression. This will also ensure that future generations of lesbians will have a history to look back on and ultimately end the secrecy that has surrounded African women's sexual identities for centuries.

CHAPTER FOUR

Policing Sexuality in Urban Townships

As such, we believe that as we share the stories of black lesbian realities, we need collectively to begin to interrogate how gender is structured through race and sexuality, and class. Why do we witness black butches contracting HIV from heterosexual men who rape them? Why, in the postcolonial gender trajectory of South African township life, does heterosexual black masculinity appear to be vested in raping black lesbian women? These are important questions we need to ask ourselves.

Zanele Muholi 2011b

In post-apartheid South Africa the prevalence of homophobic and gender-based hate crimes have increased dramatically, our country currently having “one of the highest rates of sexual violence in the world” (Lock Swarr, 2009: 543). This chapter delves into various dynamics at play in the policing of lesbian sexuality within and around urban townships such as Khayelitsha and Soweto. Although there are people who choose to live in these townships, these areas are dominated by South Africans who have limited access to economic resources, including access to proper housing, land, education, electricity and water. The stark effects of racial categorisation and the organisation of land and labour during apartheid can still be seen in these townships, eighteen years after democracy (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010: 7). The worldviews of many people living in urban townships are “still overwhelmingly dominated by a set of intersecting raced, classed and heterogendered politics that blur the lines between our apartheid past and our new democracy”, and this has immense consequences for the lived realities of lesbian-identified women in and around urban townships (Muholi, 2011b: 187). Because these communities are usually quite close, interpersonally and geographically, most black lesbians are therefore put in feeble positions

and this “closeness and dependence makes tensions over sex and sexuality particularly dangerous” (Lock Swarr, 2009: 530).

David Chidester notes that South Africa’s history of violence needs to be located “in the symbols, myths, rituals, and traditions of South African worldviews that have made violence not only powerful but also meaningful” (Chidester, 2012: 61). Colonialism and apartheid intersecting with particular interpretations of Christianity have shaped gender and violent forms of masculinity in the South African context. During colonialism, missionaries spread the beliefs of Christianity, seeking converts and influencing many indigenous African lifestyles and belief systems, taking them as slaves and occupying their land. This displacement was rooted in “violence and violation”, which lead to loss of lives, tearing apart of families and communities, “the ingraining of self-hate”, and centuries of warfare across Africa (Gqola, 2007: 113). After colonialism, proponents of apartheid instrumentalized particular Christian myths to further their ideological perspectives that encouraged the separation and dehumanisation of black people. Pumla Dineo Gqola observes that the apartheid regime also capitalized on physical violence through “militaristic control as well as the structural violence of the economy” and in this way systematically brutalized black people through various means of impoverishing, displacing and disenfranchising them (Gqola, 2007: 113). In this way it has become “too acceptable for the public to witness the assault on black bodies and somehow normalize it” (Schutte, 2012). South Africa thus has a long history of violence, and what is made clear through this history is that people tend to create “their own terms and conditions for what counts as violence” (Chidester, 2012: 61). For instance, the colonialists may not have seen what they were doing as violating or dehumanising African people, but rather as civilising them and keeping the natural order of things.

Commonalities can be drawn between the violence against black people during colonialism and apartheid, and the current lesbophobic violence against black women. Muholi notes that rape has specific localized meaning in South African culture. “Rape is a violent act that makes us bleed both literally from our vaginas, and also figuratively from our souls, much like the cultural, social, spiritual, economic, and political violence of colonialism has made us bleed figuratively and literally as we lose our lands and natural resources, our culture, and our identities,” (Muholi, 2008: 6-7). Muholi recognises that ‘rape’ has been happening for centuries in different ways to the black people of South Africa.

South Africa’s past cannot be underestimated when attempting to understand the current trends in the violent policing of sexuality, particularly within black communities. The policing of sexuality was integral to the apartheid project as this fed into keeping the minority white population ‘pure’ and separate from the oppressed black majority. Because of this emphasis on sexual separation, sexual violence was typically only a political concern when the perpetrator was black and the victim was white, which to a large extent made invisible other forms of gender-based violence (Posel, 2011: 131). Moreover, open expression and affirmation of transgressive sexualities, such as homosexuality, was deterred by entrenched homophobia that was reinforced by the criminalisation of homosexuality. These mindsets have persisted into the new South Africa, particularly in relation to right and wrong sexual conduct.

Citizenship

“In a society in which citizenship was systematically denied to the majority of the population, the promise of national citizenship has represented not only new terms of inclusion but also

new possibilities of empowerment” (Chidester, 2002: 11). Exclusions characterised citizenship under colonialism and apartheid, and today many black lesbians still find themselves in a similar situation, being excluded from conceptions of the nation in various ways. Roles and expectations of what it means to be a man or woman in the urban township context has been and continues to be influenced by a hybrid of beliefs and ideologies, such as those of Christianity and various African traditional religions, as well as the broader constitutional and political context that frames citizenship. In African cultures, social identity is often favoured over individual identity, placing emphasis on community, culture, religion, and being part of a nation. As stated by Chidester, “the rights of citizenship are entangled with religion”, and citizenship, like religion is a constant “process of negotiating human identity in time and space” (2002: 14-15).

Since 1994, the notion of ‘citizenship’ has been central to political debate in South Africa, and questions of rights, exclusions and inclusions, and ‘equality before law’, have been fundamentally connected to the meaning of a ‘new’ form of citizenship for the majority of people living in the country.

Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010

Western political ideas about citizens often view them as ungendered and disembodied (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010: 7). This has a link to notions of global citizenship that “is formed on the basis of universal rights and transnational loyalties” as promoted by “social movements, non-governmental organisations and international initiatives” (Chidester, 2002: 12). This concept of global citizenship has been influenced by globalization and has a strong connection to the transnational human rights movement. On the level of human rights, lesbians have “the right to liberty, the right to freedom from discrimination and equality before the law and the right to privacy”, although these are not always interpreted in favour of lesbians (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005: 20). In the South

African context, issues of citizenship have many dimensions. Being a citizen is ultimately entangled with conceptions of the nation, which tends to have certain cultural underpinnings, with the nation being an imagined community. Particularly within black communities, there exists a strong link between sexuality and the imagining of the nation in that “the idea of the nation is incompatible with the unruliness of sex” (Posel, 2011: 139). Homosexuals are often associated with unruly or abnormal sex, and therefore tend to be cast outside the bounds of what constitutes a healthy nation or community.

In the introduction to their article on systemic violence and homophobic attacks, Reid and Dirsuweit state that “urban citizenship entails freedom to move, use and express identity in the city” (2002: 99). In the urban township setting, lesbians often have very limited access to resources and often hold little economic and political authority, not even the authority they would have had within heterosexual relationships by attaching themselves to powerful or respected men with the community. This has consequences in that they often have very little standing in the community, in hospitals, clinics, and at police stations, and the expression of their identity is restricted. The human rights of lesbians are thus infringed upon in the way that they are often not treated as full citizens, so when hate crimes and homophobia does occur, not much is done about it. An example, as mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, is the much publicised gang rape and murder of nineteen year old lesbian Zoliswa Nkonyana in Khayelitsha. In Nkonyana’s case the judgement was made in February 2012, six years after her death and only four of the twenty men accused were sent to prison.

The policing of sexual energies and the establishment of what constitutes as “productive, life-giving sexuality” aids in the conceptualisation of what makes up “a stable, orderly and unified nation” (Posel, 2011: 139). Heterosexuality is thus associated with stability, while any form of sexuality other than this is viewed as a threat to this stability.

Posel (2011) asserts that this association is often facilitated by the use of familial and bodily metaphors for the nation, as used by people in power such as politicians.

Metaphors of the family, body and kinship provide the symbolic resources to produce this sense of familiarity and intimacy... A nation is like a closely knit, stable and nurturing family; a nation is like a healthy, energetic and disciplined body.

Deborah Posel, 2011

The control of sexualities within the community and the nation is therefore facilitated through the use of these metaphors, which provide symbolic guidelines (Posel, 2011: 139). Self-identified lesbians tend to fall outside of the fold of the nation in two ways, they are associated with wrong sexuality and they are seen as forsaking their roles as mothers, therefore not nurturing or building the nation, and on a smaller scale, the community. Therefore this form of sexuality can be considered as requiring some sort of policing, as unruly sex destabilises the family and corrupts the body. The “aspirations to nationhood are intimately linked to the productive disciplining of sexuality as a force of order rather than chaos, life rather than death” (Posel, 2011: 139). That is why associating homosexuality with promiscuity, selfishness and AIDS, within the public imagination, is so effective. As is evident, often the more visible ‘deviant’ sexualities become, the more attempts are made to police them through violence and hate speech.

Masculinity and Femininity

...At the most fundamental level, social organisation of people through gender norms as ‘men and/or ‘women’ structures, through heterosexuality, all forms of kinship alliance recognised as the basis from which

communities are constituted. The politics of reproductive norms, conventions on marriage, religious and legal approaches to what constitutes legitimate sexual practice....weave a relationship between citizenship and sexualities that is all-encompassing.

Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010

The transition to democracy in the 1990s shook deep-seated masculinities that were largely “patriarchal, authoritarian and steeped in violence” (Reid and Walker, 2005: 189). It can be surmised that there is currently a crisis of manhood in South Africa, post-apartheid. Masculinity and violence have a deep connection, and manhood in many parts of Africa is largely defined through women’s sexual activities or lack thereof. This is largely due to the assumption that we live in a two-gendered binary system, which presumes that people fit into two complimentary biological sexes (Theron, 2010: 107). As demonstrated in the previous chapter, in many ways one is led to understand that African masculinities and femininities are purely heterosexual, and this belief has been enforced by religion, culture and, in most parts of Africa, legislation.

Dobrota Pucherova observes that as justification for their subjection and oppression, “black African men were symbolically feminized by white European colonizers (as irrational, morally deviant, and sexually depraved)” (2011: 109). Similar symbolism was later used by black African writers post-independence where white men were often feminized “in being portrayed as homosexuals who prey on African men and boys”, thus presenting homosexuality as “an emasculated identity and at the same time a pathological condition that violates the gender binary” (Pucherova, 2011: 109). These conceptions ultimately construct certain norms and ideals about raced masculinities and femininities that aid certain power relations, and women who are attracted to women present resistance to this dominant ideology (Ratele, 2011: 399-400). This demonstrates the difficulty lesbians encounter when

attempting to view themselves outside of this sex-gender binary that is so ingrained into structures within society.

According to Alleyn Diesel (2011), many scholars argue that as women grow up they are bombarded with role models who emphasize their “femininity”, and are encouraged to accentuate their sexual attractiveness, all for the attention of men as objects of sexual interest. “Thus, women who flout these social and sexual expectations, refusing to define their lives by their relationship to men, are perceived as being a political, as well as a sexual, threat to the patriarchal status quo and are labelled as deviant, even at times, in many societies, being criminalised” (Diesel 2011: xiv). When one adds to this that most public spaces are coded to be heterosexual, and that many conservative South African citizens believe that sexuality belongs in the private sphere, it is then no surprise that many homosexuals feel the need to restrict expressions of their sexuality to the private sphere because of the power of this hegemonic heterosexualized codification (Reid and Dirsuweit, 2002: 100). Therefore, it is clear that sexuality is not only defined by sexual acts but also by power relations, and lesbophobic violence is largely a reaction to the subversion of norms, predominantly those around masculinity (Reid and Dirsuweit, 2002).

An example of the way that this subversion of norms is addressed is in the use of the term *stabane*. The Zulu term *stabane* refers to an intersexed person or hermaphrodite, but is often used in a derogatory manner to describe homosexuals within the urban township setting and beyond (Lock Swarr, 2009: 523). Ultimately, the term *stabane* serves as a means for explaining same-sex attraction, as an intersexed person is often believed to have two sexual organs – a penis and vagina – therefore there is still a possibility of penetrative sex, even for lesbians. Lesbians being accused of being *stabane* are often tied up with certain ideas of right sexual intercourse, with normative sex defined as heterosexual and requiring a penis. As

Kopano Ratele points out, having a penis accretes powerful meanings in different cultures, often tied up with broader grand narratives and meaning of manhood and womanhood (2011: 399). Within this context, the nature of sexual intercourse has largely been defined by men for the pleasure of men and sexual intercourse without a penis is often unimaginable (Lock Swarr, 2009: 533). Sexual difference therefore influences language and is influenced by it too, making it difficult for one to construct an identity outside of this language that is influenced so heavily by these binary thought processes.

Essentialist explanations of gender often rely on binary notions where there are clear boundaries and oppositions between men and women.... Essentialist arguments restrict both women and men to the perceived limitations of their bodies, define women and men by their bodies, and cannot account for changes in gender experiences over time or across cultures.

Laura Fingerson, 2006

The physical and essentialist nature of sexual desire is often overly emphasized through these definitions of sex and the oppositional nature of masculinity and femininity (Lock Swarr, 2009: 541). Lesbians occupy a wild space of the unknown, where they are not seen as fitting into the given social structure and by extension the nation, and are also understood to have some degree of masculinity attached to them, as attraction to women is associated with the masculine. *Stabane* is thus often viewed as a perversion of kinship ties (Lock Swarr, 2009: 532), categorising homosexuals as not normal or fully human, having two sexual organs, living between the masculine and feminine, and as social outcasts. This affirms an observation made by Judith Butler that “homophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed, or otherwise abject gender to homosexuals” (Butler, 1993: 238). In these instances, if characteristics attached to heterosexuality are deemed as positive or moral then those that deviate from heterosexuality are deemed as negative, deviant, amoral and

unacceptable. There is a fear of losing what are considered to be proper gender identities and roles, homophobia and hate crimes then become a way of regulating sexuality and gender roles through the policing and the shaming of gender.

Lesbophobic Violence

It is our torn and bleeding vaginas that are scrutinized by male police and doctors who become experts on our bodies, our subjectivities, and our experiences. It is their “expert” knowledge that decides our fate – “yes, you were raped and deserve sympathy and justice” or “no, you were not raped and you are a liar.”

Zanele Muholi, 2008.

In Africa it is no secret that gender-based violence is a common occurrence, often made to seem normal in many people’s lives. South Africa has one of the highest levels of rape and domestic violence in the world. In 1995 the country was named the ‘rape capital’ of the world (Human Rights Watch, 1995), and the 2004 statistics by the Medical Research Council showed that in South Africa every six hours a woman is killed by her intimate partner. To much of the population that live their lives either subjected to or enforcing gender based violence, these shocking statistics form part of day-to-day life. According to Muholi, although not limited to only African countries, within many African countries violence is “used to persecute, vilify, and humiliate women”, and “black lesbians keep themselves invisible for fear of violence that is permitted by the state” (Muholi, 2008: 6). Instilling fear in women is often used as a weapon, a form of control. In South Africa, in recent years the number of reported rapes has increased, in 2006 alone the overall estimate of rapes (the majority of which were not reported) was five-hundred-thousand (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010: 4). Linking violence against lesbians to the broader issues of violence

against women and children, gives one a deeper understanding of how masculinities and violence are tied up in these. When one acknowledges that rape is not the only form of violence toward women, it paints a disturbing picture of the reality of many South African women and children.

The social and psychological dynamics at play when a man is violent towards a woman has many layers. The often violent policing and shaming of 'deviant' gender identities, also serve the purpose of re-establishing the power of the accepted gender identities. In many parts of Africa, subversive sexual behaviour is contained and suppressed through legislation, imprisonment, and in extreme cases, stoning and burning at the stake, not to mention corrective rape (Diesel 2011: xiv). Thus in the case of Zoliswa Nkonyana, Sizakele Sigaza and Salome Masooa, three of the numerous lesbians who have been tortured, raped and murdered, the violation can be understood as a performance of masculinity. Black lesbians experience lesbophobic violence from gangs, meant to 'cure' them of their homosexuality, so "while homosexuality is legal, queerphobia is still rampant" (Muholi, 2008: 6).

According to Henriette Gunkel, these acts of violence attempt "to restore the gender regime that accords men a dominant position within public space – a space that represents access to economic sources that are not necessarily gendered or sexualised" (Gunkel, 2010: 82). These homophobic acts are laden with meaning within circumstances where women are often viewed as possessions and "act as a signifier for heterosexuality within these structures" (Gunkel, 2010: 90). Lesbians stand as a form of resistance against this position that highlights the availability and passivity of women, which then opens the door to the likelihood of punishment. When one adds the fact that "the South African government does not keep specific statistics on xenophobic, racist and homophobic crime," it has the effect of

increasing the unawareness of the extent of violence against lesbians (Reid and Dirsuweit, 2002: 99).

The gang rape and murder of nineteen year old Zoliswa Nkonyana in 2006 took place in the public sphere, in front of her stepfather's house. This is unusual in that most gender-based violence happens in the private sphere and is often perpetrated by people known to the victim. According to Gunkel, this reveals at least two aspects of her rape and murder, "it can be understood as a public performance" and "it demonstrates the sense of impunity with which her perpetrators acted" (Gunkel, 2010: 82). As a public performance, Nkonyana's rape and murder can be viewed as a homosocial reinforcement of masculinity, through perpetrating this crime as a group, these men reaffirmed violent heterosexual patriarchal male authority. This is an indication that the act of lesbian rape often has a ritual aspect, asserting men's entitlement to women's bodies and strengthening their heterosexual male identities. Nkabinde observes from her interviews with black lesbians that during rape the rapists often insult them, saying things like, "Ja, you! You thought you were a man!" or, "You are a lesbian because you have never had a great penis!" (2009: 145). It is apparent that many men (and women) who are responsible for the violence against black lesbian women feel threatened by this 'new' sexual identity that they are being confronted with. Lesbian identity thus impacts on male identity in the way that it facilitates an indirect emasculation of male identity.

Granting homosexuals the right to marry therefore has the potential to make homophobia worse, as the institution of marriage is bound up in religious and heterosexual ideologies and identities. Nkabinde makes the observation that being lesbian is not about wanting or not wanting to sleep with men, and this could be what is so threatening for heteropatriarchal men. If it has nothing to do with them, then they have no control over it, and this is a way of women exerting independence from men. "Women used to depend on their

husbands but now men are afraid of women taking their power” (Nkabinde, 2009: 145). This then presents opposition to the dominant norms encapsulated in African hetero-patriarchies.

Nkabinde’s dominant ancestor, Nkunzi (male), prefers her to dress in a ‘manly’ way. Nkabinde notes that men in the township tend to target women who dress in this way, identifying them as butch lesbians. Nkabinde, however, feels powerful in the clothes she wears and likes that it makes her recognisable to other lesbians, making her identity visible (2009: 146). In relation to this, Muholi, in her interviews with black lesbians, has found that many lesbians defined themselves as butch or lesbian men. This shows how “sexuality is always constructed within, and mediated through, gender identity and that any analysis of lesbophobic hate crimes must incorporate also the interplay between sexual and gendered relations of power” (Muholi, 2011b: 190-1). Lesbians are often perceived as threatening dominant masculinity by supposedly wanting to be male and in this way attempting to usurp their power (Diesel 2011: xiv).

Many lesbians still make use of heterosexualized roles within their relationships, such as butch and femme, and this can be related to the nature of ideology that Louis Althusser discusses. According to Althusser, “ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects” (Althusser, 1971: 175). It could then be surmised that as subjects of an already heterosexualized ideological system within society, it is difficult for many black lesbians (and other non-heterosexual people) to create an identity outside of these parameters, although not entirely impossible. Ultimately, ideologies about proper and appropriate forms of sexuality, masculinity and femininity, police and restrict those sexualities that do not fit the dominant ideology.

Ruling Masculinity

Kopano Ratele, in his article “Ruling masculinities in post-apartheid South Africa” (2008), makes important observations in relation to the power that ruling masculinity has over the citizens and expressions of sexuality. Ratele particularly looks at Jacob Zuma as an example of ruling masculinity, even before he started his term as president. South Africa has been dominated by figures of ruling masculinity, from colonialists to current political and cultural leaders, and this form of authority has been made to seem normal. “Assertive heterosexuality, control of economic decisions within (and outside) the home, political authority and cultural ascendancy” are basic characteristics of ruling masculinity in various parts of the world (Ratele, 2008: 124). These then aid in regulating the imagination and thought patterns of the nation. When ruling masculinity is combined with an almost essentialist attitude towards sexuality and the call for a return to ‘true’ African values that tend to idealise heterosexuality, this poses danger for non-heterosexuals. Homosexuals are thus often ostracized by Black Nationalist discourses, where there tends to be some form of false nostalgia that idealises pre-colonial Africa (Pucherova, 2011).

Jacob Zuma, as “an adherent of both Zulu ancestral tradition and evangelical Christianity” (Chidester, 2012: 8) displays a rampant heterosexuality. Zuma has on numerous occasions voiced his views about sexuality on a public platform. In 2002 when asked whether oral sex is ‘right’, at a debate in the national parliament of South Africa, part of his response was “I can’t answer on wrong things that people do that are unnatural.... We are talking about education about sex, not things that are not sex” (MacLennan 2002, as cited in Ratele 2008: 123-4). Because of Zuma’s status, his words tend to carry a lot of weight for many South Africans, particularly men (and women) who regard him as a cultural and well as

political authority. In saying the above about oral sex, when he was still vice president, he “drew a bold line between South African citizens who view him as the embodiment of the true masculine, and others whose practices do not accord with those which he suggests are ‘naturally’ right” (Ratele, 2008: 126).

Men who possess political, economic, social or cultural power who repudiate in public oral and other ‘wrong’ sexual practices silence other men and women with less political voice, less education and less cultural and economic power. In societies and cultures where women and men are unequal, the sexual rights, choices, desires and pleasure of women and marginal men are likely to be curtailed by the words of such powerful men.

Kopano Ratele, 2008.

When accused of rape in 2006, Zuma appealed to his Zulu culture when stating that he was obliged to have sex with Kwezi (the rape victim, a lesbian woman) because she was aroused. According to Gunkel, the rape case against Zuma displayed an inclination to appeal “to so-called traditional and cultural values in order to restore a gender regime that: accepts men as being in dominant public positions within society, that continually allows violence against women and that prioritizes ‘traditional’ systems of controlling women in the postcolonial nation state” (Gunkel, 2010: 47). Ultimately, with much support from Zulu women and men during the trial, Zuma was found innocent and Kwezi left the country because of constant public threat after and during the trial. This shows just how influential religious and cultural appeal is in the way many issues in society are approached, often engaging with imbedded ideologies that tend to contradict the constitution. This rape trial, combined with Zuma’s later statements on Heritage Day 2006 that accused homosexuals of being a disgrace to god, makes use of his standing as a traditional cultural god-fearing patriarch, while displaying a somewhat fundamentalist approach to religion. A possible return to religious fundamentalism, presents a threat to the South African constitution, “as it violates the moral

order of modernity by its irrational violence and intolerance, its puritanical mores and patriarchal gender discrimination, which deploy pre-modern religious impulses to challenge modern social formations” (Chidester, 2012: 73). Therefore the authority of ruling masculinity combined with religious fundamentalism can indeed be a problem in the face of sexual rights, particularly those of women and homosexuals. As Ratele notes, “a ruling masculinity is powerfully capable of organizing ideas on sexuality and human rights” (2008: 128), so even though South Africa’s progressive constitution was implemented before Zuma came into power, he still has the ability to encourage or limit the progression of constitutional rights and in this way policing sexuality.

It needs to be spelled out that even in these cases of sexual discrimination, where a form of masculinity, supported by political power, aggressively reasserts its ascendancy over other forms, the undeniable fact is that gay masculinities exist, as do women who do not desire men sexually. It is the challenge posed by this reality which sends rulers (ruling masculinity) into a rage. This, contradictorily, is an indication of the resistance practices in different locales which subsequently shape the relations that ruling males (those with more power) have with other males, with females and with the social and material world.

Kopano Ratele, 2008.

Religion as Ideology

Louis Althusser asserts that Ideological State Apparatuses make use of ideological modes of control and also help maintain the dominant social formation, thus functioning primarily ‘by ideology’. Ideology forms a large part of socialisation that makes use of family structures, belief systems, ideas and values, media, education, rituals and practices; and people experience their world as a coherent whole through these and find their place as subjects

within it (Resch, 1992: 207). The function of ideology is the reproduction of existing relations and regulations, relations that people have to the world around them (Resch, 1992: 209). By positioning religion as an ideological state apparatus, Althusser recognises that religion in its ideological capacity plays an intricate role in the way that people position themselves in the world. In this light, “stereotypes, icons, symbols, sacred texts, and ritual objects in patriarchal traditions are never neutral but rather part and parcel of structures of oppression and domination” (Lohmann and Sered, 2007: 10).

Ideology aims for cohesion, and it achieves this aim by means of the social subject, not as a result of the autonomous activity of human beings, but rather by means of the structured process of constituting human beings as social subjects.

Robert Paul Resch, 1992.

By naturalising existing social relations, ideology attempts to mask contradictions. For instance, by naturalising heterosexuality in various ways, such as through ideals about marriage and kinship, the credibility of homosexuality may be questioned, heterosexuality then becomes both inevitable and coherent through excluding differences. Ideology thus aids particular forms of social cohesion, and in the African context this can be seen in the many ways that fantasies of heterosexuality are ingrained into the imagination of many Africans. It is through beliefs and strategies like these that “ruling masculinity indicates a design of practices, relations and supportive cognitive and affective discourses that seek to have us believe in the naturalness of men’s power over women, other men and children” (Ratele 2008; 128).

According to Althusser, within religious ideology the interpellation of individuals as subjects “presupposes the ‘existence’ of a Unique and central Other Subject, in whose Name the religious ideology interpellates all individuals as subjects” (Althusser, 1971: 178).

Because in many cases this Other Subject, i.e. God, is masculinised, it can be surmised that the male then becomes the normative subject. Lesbians infringe on this, in the way that they are subjects outside of this hegemonic system of masculine dominance and order. Althusser further observes that the structure of all ideology is a mirror-structure and this ensures its functioning. Caught in the system of interpellation as subjects, 'good subjects' are inserted into the practices governed by the rituals of the Ideological State Apparatuses, these 'good subjects' recognise that the existing state of affairs as right and true and therefore should not be otherwise. These 'good subjects' recognise that "they must be obedient to God, to their conscience, and ruling masculinities that are socially, religiously, culturally and politically in charge (Althusser, 1971). The 'bad subjects', who are the exception, provoke the intervention of the Repressive State Apparatuses. Thus, homosexuality as part of human identity, occupies the liminal/wild space of the "bad subject" within heteronormative and patriarchal societies. If characteristics attached to heterosexuality are deemed as positive, then those attached to homosexuality are deemed as negative, evil, immoral and unacceptable.

South Africa remains a profoundly conservative society where the attitudes of generations will not be altered in a few short years. The recent rise in fundamentalist religion and the seemingly unabated scourge of AIDS, with all the shame and secrecy still surrounding those who are HIV positive, are salutary reminders that discrimination and intolerance of difference still flourish in numerous areas.

Alleyn Diesel, 2011.

The influence of religious figures such as the Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini, who showed his disapproval of the homosexual lifestyle in February 2012, calling it wrong, rotten and unacceptable, therefore cannot be underestimated in the policing of black lesbian sexuality.

Religion as Enabling

The sacred is produced in relation to wild forces. Sacred space and time, sacred roles, rituals, and objects, are created by both excluding and incorporating the wild.... On the one hand, the wild stands as an obstacle to maintaining social order. The wild is untamed, undomesticated, uncultivated, unrestrained, unruly, and dangerous.... On the other hand, the wild stands as energy for creating social order. The wild is dynamic, natural, extraordinary, enthusiastic, ecstatic, and invigorating.

David Chidester, 2012.

Although there are many ideological fronts that attempt to control individuals, these structures can be enabling as well. According to Althusser's theory, structures or ideologies are both the creation of human beings and the mould that they fit into, therefore "social structures would not exist without their (willing or unwilling, conscious or unconscious) participation" (Hays, 1994: 61). Structures are thus both enabling and constraining, for instance the system of gender stratification "not only constrains men and women to act in certain ways, it also gives them both a sense of identity and a secure position in the world" (Hays, 1994: 61). The patriarchal dimensions of religion, in its ideological capacity and as an influential institutional structure, has many implications for the understanding of what it means to be a human being, and in many instances in South Africa, homophobia gets entangled in this understanding. When one understands religion as a structure that both conditions and restricts while at the same time being perpetuated by the very people that it conditions and restricts, it becomes clear that its effects are inescapable. The perception of religion as an institutional social structure aids the analysis of persisting homophobia and hate crimes in the South African context, it helps one realise that the violence against queer people is not just physical and emotional but structural as well. Thus, the discrimination is so ingrained in the ideologies of the society that it goes largely unnoticed until it gets pointed

out. It then becomes clear that “religion does not necessarily stand outside of violence” but rather has the ability to “animate violence, from direct harm to persons and property to fundamental violations of humanity, as a wild force that threatens but also energizes a variety of human projects” (Chidester, 2012: 72).

At the same time, when one looks at the lives of lesbian *sangomas*, strong religious connections such as those of the ancestors and healing powers, could be a way of subverting homophobia. Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, among other lesbian *sangomas*, is a testament to this. Nkabinde finds ways to express her sexuality while working within the Zulu tradition of being a traditional healer. When speaking about homophobia, she alludes to a sort of protection that is afforded to lesbian *sangomas* because of their powers and relationship with the ancestors, which lessens the possibility of homophobic attacks against them within their communities. In this way religion also plays a powerful role, rather than justifying homophobic attacks, here it has a different effect. This accords with observations in the previous chapter that same-sex intimacy is often accepted and regulated within African religious and cultural imaginings and belief systems, that appear to work for the good of the community and are ordained by higher powers such as ancestors. Nkabinde notes that in many ways she is more protected than other lesbians in the township, because of her status as a sangoma and the special connection she has with the ancestors and her status in the community (2009: 147). Although Nkabinde does still have some fear – what if someone who does not know that she is a sangoma, or who does not care, tries to attack her. But most people in the township “have that fear in them of what a sangoma will do to them” (Nkabinde, 2009: 148). In this way religion has the effect of protecting Nkabinde, giving her more freedom to express her sexuality. But even though Nkabinde is to an extent protected as a sangoma, what does this mean for other majority of black lesbians who are not *sangomas*?

Does this then give reason for the policing of their sexuality or could this shine light on the fact that same-sex intimacy has long existed within African culture and should not be denied.

This is evidence of the ever changing and open set of resources that religion offers. David Chidester, in *Wild Religion* focuses on “religion as an open set of resources and strategies for negotiating a human identity, which is poised between the more than human and the less than human, in the struggles to work out the terms and conditions for living in a human place oriented in sacred space and sacred time” (Chidester, 2012: ix). So although ideological in nature, no religion or ideology can be viewed as completely fixed and stable. Indigenous African religion is a good example of this fluidity as it has been moulded out of various forms of colonial encounter and intercultural translation (Chidester, 2012: 191).

Althusser asserts that there is room for individual autonomy and this is what leads to the change and revolution that destabilises dominant ideologies. This can be seen in the way that homosexuality has now become more visible and has spurred change in certain ideologies, the South African constitution being one of them. The fact that Zanele Muholi has the ability to document, exhibit, and bring into the public sphere the lives of black lesbian women is also a testament to this autonomy. Gabeba Baderoon (2010), in response to the Minister Xingwana’s comments noted that it is the artists’ role to be a “dissident to conventional thinking”, in this way they spark creative, ethical, political and personal responses from the viewer. That is why, although Muholi’s work “will no doubt enrage the moral majority”, its controversial character is what is needed to draw attention to the oppressive nature of heterosexuality as an institution (Smith, 2006: 90-91).

Conclusion

The discourses of gender in the South African public sphere are very conservative in the main: they speak of ‘women’s empowerment’ in ways that are *not* transformative, and as a consequence, they exist very comfortably alongside overwhelming evidence that South African women are *not* empowered: the rape and other gender based violence statistics, the rampant sexual harassment at work and public spaces, the siege on black lesbians and raging homophobia, the very public and relentless circulation of misogynist imagery, metaphors and language.

Pumla Dineo Gqola, 2007.

The persistence of hate crimes against black lesbians in urban townships demonstrates a dynamic mix of religious and cultural ideologies, political influences and South Africa’s history. It is therefore apparent that relationships between sexuality, gender and sex are not fixed but are outcomes of located practices that influence people’s conceptions of these. This chapter has interrogated how these located and historical practices in South Africa have normalised the violent policing of ‘deviant’ sexualities, particularly within black communities in and around urban townships.

By analysing the effects of colonialism, apartheid, ruling masculinity and religion, it is evident that current violent acts of lesbophobia are deeply affected by understandings of right sexuality, morality, and gender roles, and ultimately what it means to be a human being. As Muholi observes, “in South African black culture, being a black lesbian is seen as negative, as destroying the nuclear heterosexual family, and as un-African” (2009: 19). As shown in this chapter, this view of lesbian goes hand in hand with traditional understandings of heterosexual masculinity and femininity. By not conforming to tradition, lesbians are viewed as ‘deviants’ who want to be male, and thus deserve to be raped (Muholi, 2009: 19). In this way their rights as South African citizens are not being acknowledged, and comments such as those often made by political authorities like Jacob Zuma are reinforcing and encouraging these discriminative attitudes.

Religion and kinship structures often work hand in hand in the creation and maintenance of hegemonic ideas around sexuality. Thus, sexuality rights put in place by the state have difficulty being integrated into society, as religious rights/beliefs that are put in place through tradition and sacred institutions hold more value within communities. Therefore a sense of 'belonging' for LGBTI people does not come easy. And the question still remains of what the use of human rights is in an environment that is hostile to same sex relationships (van Zyl, 2009: 366). This process of acceptance and integration will take time and can only be facilitated through projects such as those of Zanele Muholi and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde.

The following chapter addresses various ways that one can attempt to change these ingrained ideologies that facilitate the policing of sexuality. Through the use of Muholi and Nkabinde as case studies, I analyze the way that they attempt to establish their lesbian identities, and the strategies they use to do so. The intricacies of creating a strong independent black lesbian identity will be addressed. This shows possible ways that black lesbians can come up against these forces, become more visible, and fully express their sexual identity so that the dominant myth of heterosexuality as normal, moral and wholesome can be abandoned. The creation of a lesbian identity has become a priority to combat oppressive masculinities and religious ideologies.

CHAPTER FIVE

Negotiating Black Lesbian Identities in South Africa

There are very few possible role models for contemporary black South African lesbians that encourage the search for a lesbian identity (Diesel 2011: xii), the notion of a South African black lesbian identity in itself being very complex, requiring negotiations between indigenous and western conceptualizations of same-sex intimacy. This chapter aims to help better understand the experiences of black lesbians and the possible strategies available to them to create an identity, and the obstacles that these strategies may come up against. By focusing on Zanele Muholi and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, as possible role models, one is able to better understand and analyse possible approaches to these negotiations. The experiences and actions of Muholi and Nkabinde provide insight into how they attempt to establish their own black lesbian identities and help others to do the same. This negotiation considers South Africa's political history and the history of female same-sex relationships in Africa. There is a need "for successful, responsible, well-adjusted, professional, happy, attractive and vulnerable lesbian role models" that demolish "damaging stereotypes and demonstrate that this is an appropriate and acceptable choice open to women" (Diesel 2011: xiv). This foregrounds the challenges that face many black lesbian activists today. More specifically, the creation of 'black' lesbian identities points to the discrepancies in the South African context within which a singular homogenized homosexual identity is impossible considering the many cultural, racial, class and gender differences present within the country.

As shown in the preceding chapters, women's efforts to claim gender identities outside of heterosexual boundaries have faced opposition. Through analysing Muholi's and Nkabinde's actions, it is clear that although not always successful, certain strategies are used

in their day to day lives and work to combat these oppositions. While the creation of black lesbian identities is socially important, the lives of Muholi and Nkabinde illustrate that black lesbians are by no means a homogenous group. As reflected in chapter two, Muholi's approach places the black lesbian female body in the public sphere through her photographs. Muholi's photographs foreground the lived reality of black lesbians, their "life choices, decisions, failures, confusions, discoveries, rejections" (Gqola, 2006, 84). Nkabinde as a lesbian *sangoma*, asserts her lesbian identity through the genre of autobiography where she is situated as firmly located within the broader Zulu religious scheme as a *sangoma*. For her there is a more explicit and conscious reconciliation of her sexuality with her religion, more so than is reflected in Muholi's work.

Both Muholi and Nkabinde display a need to help other black lesbians and their work foregrounds the tension between "two very different ways of dealing with homosexuality, the traditional approach, which finds ways of accommodating it and not talking about it, and the modern, 'Western' way, which claims for homosexuals a public 'gay' identity" (Gevisser 1999: 963, cited in Morgan and Reid 2003). For instance, they both place emphasis on self-identifying as lesbian, which leans on western feminist reasoning, while at the same time placing importance on community and belonging as framed by African value systems. This feeds into an observation by Morgan and Reid that in Africa "homosexuality has become so central to debates about tradition and culture" (2003: 377), and there is a tension between traditional and modern, rural and urban, private and public that is very apparent.

Self-Identifying as 'Lesbian'

Both Muholi and Nkabinde emphasize their lesbian identities, however, this is somewhat at odds with the ways that female same-sex intimacy in Africa has existed and been treated in the past, as shown in chapter three. Their emphasis on asserting an exclusive same-sex orientation in public is at odds with the way that black female same-sex intimacy has operated within existing cultural spaces and times from pre-colonialism to the present. Within this context, western ways of defining and approaching sexual orientation, that have become increasingly fixed, has tended to limit the fluidity of African expressions of intimacy. For instance, as discussed by Hiram Perez (2005: 177-178), the very act of *being* “gay” tends to require some sort of mobility and access to certain resources, which are not universally available, thus premising the “gay” identity on “whiteness” that is largely embodied by the cosmopolitan white liberated male. Therefore, often the very act of ‘coming out of the closet’ “hinges on mobility, globalized consumerism, and imperialism” (Perez, 2005: 178). When these terms and concepts such as “gay” or “coming out” are then transposed into different contexts, such as that of the marginalised black South African lesbian, the very models and ideals that they are based on become questionable. So “as conceptions of sexuality seem to become increasingly fixed gender becomes fixed as well” (Gunkel, 2010: 134), this is then at odds with the notion that gender identifications are constantly under negotiation within various contexts.

Ann Ferguson, American Professor of Philosophy and Women’s studies, has defined ‘lesbian’ as “a woman who has sexual and erotic-emotional ties primarily with women or who sees herself as centrally involved with a community of self-identified lesbians whose sexual and erotic-emotional ties are primarily with women; and who is herself a self-identified lesbian” (1981: 166). This definition of female same-sex intimacy, as an import from the West, cannot just be superimposed onto the South African context. American definitions of same-sex relations express the need to box people into a stabilized sexual

identity. Western feminists have tended to export notions of strict sexual identities that create homosexuals where it could be argued that none existed before, and in this way have assisted in repressing same-sex conduct that does not fit into these definitions (Massad 2002, cited in Esack and Mahomed, 2011: 44). For instance, “In Soweto, as is true in many cultures, having sex with someone of the same sex does not necessarily change your sexual orientation; lesbian and gay identifications are usually based on gender identification as well as sexual practices” (Lock Swarr, 2009: 534). In urban township context, a ‘lesbian’ is someone who takes up a more masculine role (butch), while a ‘gay’ man is the effeminate man in the sexual relationship, and in this way the partners who more or less stick to their heteronormative gender roles within these same-sex encounters, are in many cases still considered ‘straight’ in the eyes of the community (Lock Swarr, 2009). So within the South African urban township context, what makes someone homosexual is often not just tied up with self-identification, but with the way that the community perceives the individual and their gender identity. Sexual acts in this instance are not equated with sexual identity – as is the case in many Western conceptualisations of sexuality. “In fact contemporary homophobic notions of homosexuality as un-African are not referring to older and culturally specific forms of same-sex intimacy,” (Gunkel, 2010: 135), where gender roles were viewed in a more fluid way as long as they did not disrupt the overarching gender hierarchy. This is especially pertinent in that African traditional cultures may not have had a concept for ‘homosexuality’ or ‘lesbian’, but still found ways to incorporate actions that may be categorised as homosexual today into their lives, cultures and communities, often in very fluid and creative ways.

Ferguson’s definition places emphasis on the self-identification that comes with the concept ‘lesbian’. According to Gunkel, this feeds into the Western metropolitan model that emphasizes a public lesbian identity, which could have “a restrictive effect on other forms of same-sex intimacy, such as ‘mummy-baby’ relationships but also ‘women marriages’”

(Gunkel, 2010: 134). According to Perez (2005: 177-178), the western conception of a homosexual identity has been conceived within a tradition of possessive individualism, closely tied to concepts of liberation and self-determination, which is somewhat at odds with the way that same-sex practices have been dealt with in non-western settings. The very notion of the closet is premised on some sort of access to privacy and certain economic, cultural, and familial factors. Thus when the act of coming out and making oneself visible is emphasized in queer theory literature, such as that of Ferguson (1981, 2007), a disjuncture becomes apparent. Thus, although Ferguson's definition avoids the trivialization of lesbian relations as sexually defined and as focusing only on sexual acts, lesbianism is still to a large extent at odds with certain conceptualizations of same-sex intimacy in Africa. Muholi and Nkabinde through publicly attaching themselves to this identification as black 'lesbians' have placed themselves and others in a tenuous position. Identifying as lesbian currently carries with it many negative connotations within urban townships, and denotes some sort of agency and individuality that goes against certain religious and cultural beliefs where one's sexuality and gendered role fits into a broader structure that looks out for the greater good of the community, which feeds into the view of homosexuality as unAfrican. 'Homosexuality' thus needs to be cleansed of negative implications, and Muholi and Nkabinde as black lesbian activists have taken it upon themselves to facilitate this change, following in the footsteps of many first world lesbians and feminists (Ferguson, 1981: 162). As Muholi asserts, "Naming and 'being' is an act that demands that we organize ourselves politically and socially as black women who intimately love other women" (Muholi, 2009: 9). Self-identifying as a lesbian and in this way declaring oneself as an entity is therefore believed to have liberatory and emancipatory qualities. However, this setting apart through naming emphasizes individuality and standing apart from ingrained structures, while at the same time implying a new category of classification and possible community. Muholi realises this when she asserts that the

“power of naming means to put something into existence” (Muholi, 2009: 9). Similarly, Nkabinde by naming herself as a lesbian *sangoma*, also places emphasis on the act of naming and claiming a sexuality that is not viewed as normative.

This has further implications in the African context where female same-sex relationships have existed in various contexts (as shown in chapter three), but the women within these relationships often do not relate to the term ‘lesbian’, as their same-sex practices often fit into the broader societal structures. For example, black women involved in same-sex intimacy that grew up in the 1960s-70s do not tend to identify with ‘lesbian’ but, as in the case of female *sangomas*, rather position their same-sex relationships within the broader cultural framework (Nkabinde, 2009; Morgan and Reid, 2003). Identifying as openly homosexual within African cultures is often then viewed as “the assertion of an individual desire at the expense of collective, communal well-being” (Morgan and Reid, 2003: 386). Therefore, the development or concept of a ‘lesbian’ identity, when placed historically, is a relatively recent phenomenon. This does not, however, deny the existence of same-sex intimacy before the category was formulated, but rather recognises that this category of ‘lesbian’ is a largely western invention. The understandings of intimacy within these relationships therefore “do not fit in easily with the gender binaries that underlie the sexuality apparatus of the West,” (Gunkel, 2010: 133).

According to Morgan and Reid, “most black lesbians who are out of the closet are young women who form part of the lesbian and gay movement that came to the fore in the late 1980s,” (2003: 380). These younger black lesbians fall into the era of liberation and democracy, which foregrounds many western ideals, such as feminism and freedom of expression. The self-identification of a black lesbian identity thus speaks to a specific generation of black women that have grown up with the effects of various movements

emphasizing human rights and feminist ideals, not to mention the effects of globalization, in conjunction with their 'traditional' African beliefs and mores.

Crossing Boundaries

Henriette Gunkel analyses one of Muholi's photographs entitled "ID Crisis" (2003), which shows a black woman wrapping or unwrapping her breasts with bandages. Gunkel observes that Muholi sees the act depicted in the photograph as a performance or mimicry of heterosexuality (2009: 79). An excerpt from the caption next to the photograph reads: "this is a problem at school when teenagers have no one to confide in and talk about their sexual orientation, their 'otherness', no-one to help them understand who they are, or how to be" (Muholi cited in Gunkel, 2009: 79). According to Gunkel, Muholi recognises this performance as a problem that is a result of the lack of black lesbian role models and sexual orientation education, which results in some black lesbians being ignorant about the many gendered possibilities that being lesbian offers them outside the realms of butch and femme (Gunkel, 2009: 79).

Coming to terms with the many implications of a lesbian lifestyle often involves the invariably painful defining and constructing of a new identity: one that flies in the face of all the heterosexist clichés and expectations with which young girls are indoctrinated.

Alleyn Diesel, 2011.

Sexual identities often require negotiations between culturally specific contexts and essentialist arguments that link one's sexuality to one's sex. Presently, within the urban township context, many black lesbians only have heterosexualized examples of sexual

identities to draw from. Heterosexuality, as the normative sexual identity, which encapsulates and assumes a complimentary and binary relationship between men and women, or masculine and feminine, has a very prominent place in the structure of society and we are confronted with it at every turn. This has led to many lesbian couples imitating straight relationships and mimicking heterosexualized roles. Nkabinde notes that “until our society changes, gay relationships will follow suit. Some straight men beat their wives and some butch lesbians do the same. So there is that kind of idea that being butch means being in control, like patriarchy where men are responsible for things” (Nkabinde, 2009: 125-6). So even though lesbian couples provide an alternative to the heterosexual couple, many black lesbian relationships still make use of heterosexualized roles and identities, often having one butch and one femme partner, this shows just how ingrained certain conceptions about gender roles are.

However, these heterosexualized gender roles and identities also have a place within more traditional forms of female same-sex intimacy within Africa, although these gender roles were often more fluid, allowing a female to go between masculine and feminine gender roles in different times and spaces. This is evident in the institution of *sangoma*, where through possession by the ancestors, female *sangomas* are able to display different gender identities at different times. In many African cultures, female *sangomas* taking ancestral wives are not uncommon, as this is believed to appease the dominant male ancestor. What’s more, in these ancestral marriages, there are still traditional gender roles at play, as traditional African same-sex activity tends to accommodate heterosexual gender roles in one way or another. More generally, often associated with status and wealth, and forming part of the broader cultural and religious structures, “female-to-female marriage demonstrates that it is possible to be a social male, with the accompanying trappings of wealth and status including multiple wives” (Morgan and Reid, 2003: 379). It can therefore be surmised that female

sangomas are viewed and treated as honorary males and their power is inflected with masculinity (Stobie, 2011: 158).

It has been hypothesized by Gevisser that “the institution of *sangoma* might have developed as a way for women-identified women to find space for themselves outside of the patriarchy; at the very least, it presents to Africans a model of a respected community member who defines herself independently of men” (Gevisser 2000, 123). But is this institution of the female *sangoma* really outside of patriarchy if these female *sangomas* are still said to be largely controlled by their ancestors, with many of the dominant ancestors being male? For instance, when referring to her dominant ancestor Nkunzi, Nkabinde states “It is him who is talking, he is praising himself using my body. It is him talking, expressing love for himself,” (2009: 156). Therefore, when the dominant male ancestor is present the female *sangoma* takes on his “maleness and becomes a man”, and this complicates many current dominant discourses on gender by presenting it as fluid and changing (Nkabinde and Morgan, 2005: 248).

However, the institution of lesbian *sangoma* is unique in its negotiation of traditional beliefs and practices, and a global frame of reference (Stobie, 2011: 157). Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde being a self-identified lesbian *sangoma* is testament to this. Nkabinde through identifying herself as a lesbian *sangoma*, places herself between two worlds. She has the opportunity to create some distinct values and possibilities through the construction of her identity as a lesbian *sangoma*. As far as a black lesbian identity is concerned, the ‘lesbian *sangoma*’ shows how the interaction between traditional and modern is nuanced and complicated. Morgan and Reid (2003) highlight the role of the ancestors and the different levels of agency that they afford the *sangoma* in expressing her sexuality while at the same time finding a way to weave homosexual tendencies into the larger framework of the tradition and community. “In this paradigm, the idea of personal agency in relation to gender identity

is subordinate to the influence of the ancestral guides. In fact, the *sangomas* often express a reluctant compliance with the ancestor's wishes. This is very different from the sense of personal self-identification understood by the identity categories of 'lesbian' or 'bisexual' in a Western context," (Morgan and Reid, 2003: 384).

Some older female *sangomas* claim that the ancestors are the one's choosing their same-sex partners for them and that they have no choice in the matter, while younger lesbian *sangomas*, like Nkabinde, look to their ancestors but also to their own agency in the way that they view their sexuality, having a more fluid relationship. Furthermore, Nkabinde's status as a lesbian is somewhat protected from homophobic acts by her status as a *sangoma*, "for a woman who would otherwise experience the marginal status of being a lesbian, having a male ancestor speak and act through her gives her unquestionable authority in the particular social context" (Morgan and Reid, 2003: 387). But this also has the reverse effect of further marginalizing black lesbians who do not have the cultural authority of *sangoma*.

Sometimes I feel tense inside because what I was taught about Zulu culture as a child in KZN is in conflict with what I have learned from growing up and living the life of a lesbian in Meadowlands. For example, there is a part of me that believes in virginity testing. My ancestor, Nkunzi, also influences my beliefs. For Nkunzi, virginity testing is a way of keeping Zulu culture alive. Nkunzi believes in keeping power in the hands of the elders because they are the ones who know what is best for everyone in the community.

Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, 2009.

The above quote emphasises the way that Nkabinde straddles different spheres. At once she is torn between the rural and urban settings that she was brought up in, with her Zulu culture more rooted in KwaZulu-Natal, and her lesbian identity more located in the urban setting of Meadowlands. Nkabinde thus finds herself in constant negotiations of space and time, and this reflects some of the ideological ambiguities and complexities of her position as a lesbian

sangoma. Her personal freedom to declare herself a ‘lesbian’ and her work that emphasizes gender equality is in conflict with the fact that her dominant ancestor condones virginity testing. So while she is empowered by being a *sangoma* within the Zulu religion, this status is imbued with the power of the elders and ancestors, which in turn impinges on the sexual expression of young Zulu women in the form of rituals such as virginity testing. Nkabinde thus negotiates between traditional beliefs and practices, and a globalised frame of reference, she is constantly figuring out ways to please Nkunzi her ancestor while also taking into consideration her own needs (Stobie, 2011: 157). There is thus a constant negotiation of space, time and agency. Therefore although Nkabinde identifies as lesbian, if one thinks of the self as “not a singular unified entity with an apparent identity”, then the argument can be made for the “fluidity and polymorphous nature of sexual desire, attraction and conduct” (Esack and Mahomed, 2011: 44-45), as demonstrated by Nkabinde throughout her autobiography. This then stands in opposition to Western ideals of adopting a fixed sexual orientation, even though this does not stop Nkabinde from asserting a fixed sexual identity as a black lesbian.

Community and Identity Politics

If I could have my way, I would hold a huge rally and invite parents of gay children and friends of gay children and members of the public and the police. I would not invite just gay people but everyone together, and I would ask them to join in a march like the women who marched on the Union Buildings, so that with one voice we can shout: “No more! No more!”

Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, 2009

One cannot underestimate the impact of events such as the annual Pride marches in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Public events like these are a form of expression and recognition of non-heterosexual identities, and these play an integral part in increasing the visibility and making known the plight of the queer community. Within the history of South Africa, civil activist action in the form of marches has formed the foundation of much revolution, including the dismantling of the apartheid regime. What is now known as the ‘Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade’, started out as a political stance by the queer community of South Africa, initiated by the Gay and Lesbian Organization of Witwatersrand (GLOW) in 1990, a mixed race organization. Parades and marches such as Pride have the potential to increase the unity of the queer community, as well as providing a public platform for voicing injustices. Edwin Cameron, when remembering the first Pride march in Johannesburg, states: “We marched for dignity and for respect and for justice. We marched as a joyful assertion of our gay and lesbian selves. And we marched to secure the freedom for everyone to be gay and lesbian without covering their heads” (Cameron, 2006: 4). In recent years, however, Pride has been criticized by activists for losing its political edge and rather having turned into a big party for a majority of white homosexuals in attendance.

The 2012 Johannesburg Pride Parade on October sixth, where over twenty-thousand people attended, showed up many flaws in the idealised view of a unified South African queer community. The parade was halted when, in an act of defiance and civil disobedience, some black lesbian female activists from the One in Nine campaign staged a “die-in” in front of the marchers (Schutte, 2012; Davis, 2012). The activists called for one minute of silence in remembrance of the many queer individuals who had been raped and murdered over the past few years for expressing their sexual identity. The One in Nine organization formed during the Zuma rape trial in 2006 and is significant of the estimated one in nine rapes that are reported, their t-shirts at Pride thus read “Stop the war on women’s bodies”. Even though the

slogan for this year's parade was "Protecting our Rights", this demonstration was not well received and became an aggressive altercation between the activists and those at the forefront of the march. This resulted in many members of One in Nine being assaulted and verbally abused by so-called "fellow" members of the queer community, before the police removed the activists (Davis, 2012). Tanya Harford, one of the organisers (all of them white), "is caught on camera violently pushing a One in Nine protestor to the ground before throwing her body onto those sitting on the road, arms flaying" (Schutte, 2012). It has been argued that this demonstration of civil disobedience was necessary and forced the point that the Pride parade had become depoliticised and sponsor driven (Shutte, 2012). The "One in Nine activists accused Joburg Pride organisers of running a depoliticized, elitist, commercialised event totally divorced from what the real function of Pride should be" (Davis, 2012), and a far cry from what it started out as in 1990. While this year's Pride organisers have accused the activists of disrupting and ambushing the event.

What this episode makes evident, is that almost two decades after democracy has been achieved, in the post-apartheid South African context, there are still many issues around and intersections between race, class, gender, and sexual orientation, and these have specific implications for black lesbian identities. Because of the vast diversity, the queer 'community' in South Africa does not show many similarities between their lived realities, from the cosmopolitan white gay man to the impoverished black lesbian. Thus, "to even speak of a gay 'community' here, though it may be politically expedient to imply unity, is probably misleading" (Davis, 2012). Black lesbians therefore often rely on smaller communities, organisations and homosocial spaces that are specifically for them, and understand their social needs, for example, One in Nine and the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW).

The 'Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade' originally started as the 'Lesbian and Gay Pride March'. Shifting the purpose from a serious political march to a more fun parade, Pride thus slowly started losing its political edge. The foregrounding of gay rather than lesbian also became reflective of the white male "mainstream gay community, which has an enormous influence within the organization of the Pride" (Gunkel, 2010: 73). The Pride Parade can thus be viewed as a microcosm of the larger South African context. As shown in the previous chapter, many black lesbians within the urban township setting do not have the "material resources nor the supportive networks that many white lesbians, white gay men and black gay men have" (Lewis, 2005: 145). Many self-identified black lesbians, because of poverty and lack of access to education, do not have the resources to build up their identities and challenge normative heterosexual structures within the communities they live in. This is evidenced in the numerous attacks on black lesbians, which the One in Nine activists were proposing a minute of silence for. Therefore, as demonstrated at the 2012 Pride Parade, queerness as a unified identity cannot constitute a common political ground in South Africa (Nath, 2012). With the organization and demographic of Pride being mostly white, the lack of interest displayed in the personal and political plight of the black lesbian activists that halted the parade can then be contextualized to an extent. In this light, by negating its political edge, Pride has also negated differences and concerns within the LGBTI community in recent years.

Coming Out

Both Muholi and Nkabinde have gone public with their identities as black lesbians. Muholi, through her national and international exhibitions, talks, writing, interviews and

documentaries has aided the creation of a black lesbian identity that does not just emulate the negative. Her photographs force one to question one's own identity and deeply instilled beliefs of what is right and wrong or acceptable and unacceptable. Muholi has two main audiences; the people she is making the photographs about, to create a voice and a history for them; while at the same time she wants to educate a different audience, the people who dismiss homosexuals as unnatural and who are homophobic and who refuse to acknowledge their existence as full human beings. The only way one can address such a broad audience is through the public sphere. Muholi's work has however been more accepted and praised internationally than in her own country. Perhaps this is because her work arguably reflects mainly Western methods and strategies to express and make sense of her lesbian identity. She is clearly perceived as threatening, as evident in the theft of her works in April 2012. In this incident, twenty of Muholi's hard drives containing the last five years of her work were stolen from her Cape Town apartment, with nothing much else being taken in the robbery (Jones, 2012). These hard drives were comprised of many photographs and information acquired while documenting black lesbian lives all over Africa.

Nkabinde's opportunity to go public with her sexuality came when she started as a tour guide on the GALA Queer Tour that shows the history of black and white homosexuals in South Africa, from Johannesburg to Soweto, and how they were involved in the struggle (Nkabinde, 2009: 123). In 2002, Nkabinde helped start the 'Sangomas Coming Out' group with a mere 10 gay and lesbian *sangomas* from the Gauteng province, now there are more than 40 same-sex *sangomas* part of this organisation (Nkabinde, 2009: 123). This combined with her autobiographical book and the work that she has done for GALA, comprising of tours and research, makes a big contribution to the unravelling of black same-sex identities. But this public form of expression has also come up against opposition from her *sangoma* community. Nkabinde has found herself coming up against elders in the *sangoma* community

demanding that she keep her lesbian sexuality and relationships secret “because lesbians are not part of African life” (Nkabinde, 2009: 121).

Both Muholi and Nkabinde thus place emphasis on the act of coming-out or going public with their sexual identities as this facilitates progress in their respective projects aimed at strengthening the black lesbian community and uncovering/creating a history for them. Nkabinde, through finding and speaking to other black lesbian and gay *sangomas*, has found a community, one which she thought had not existed. In her chapter entitled “In Search of Community”, Nkabinde outlines her involvement with Ruth Morgan at the Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA), and how this helped her find out more about same-sex sexuality in Africa and her identity as a lesbian sangoma (Nkabinde, 2009: 77-120). Within six months, Nkabinde had interviewed over 30 *sangomas*, and through this discovered that she was part of a broader community that spanned the whole of South Africa.

Muholi as a feminist activist photographer examines and documents female same-sex relationships through a visual lens, which requires that she seek out and communicate with black lesbians. Muholi notes that “one of our collective painful experiences as a community is the loss of friends and acquaintances through disease and hate crimes. Some of these participated in my visual projects. What is left behind now is the individual portrait that works as a site of memory for us, as a trace of ‘who and what existed’ in a particular space at this particular moment when our black lesbian and South African histories intersect” (Muholi, 2009: 27). Muholi thus fosters the formation or visibility of ‘new’ sexual identities and calls into question embedded ones.

When I first started interviewing same-sex *sangomas* for GALA, I was nervous. I had a strong need to be connected to other lesbian *sangomas* because for a long time I had felt completely alone. I wanted to live my life as a sangoma and a lesbian – as one person – not divided up into pieces and I wanted to connect with other lesbian *sangomas* who felt the same way.

Muholi and Nkabinde thus facilitate the creation of *her-story* that could form the foundation of what could in the future become a recognisable black lesbian identity. An attempt to fill the historical gap in literature about women's lives is integral in the creation of a lasting identity, something for future generations of lesbians to look back on and learn from. As shown in previous chapters, the history of homosexuality in South Africa is set within the broader historical parameters of the narrative of colonialism and apartheid, of which key components were heterosexuality and patriarchy. The existence of non-heterosexuals has therefore been suppressed and policed, deemed a crime by many governments and political authorities that enforce laws and forms of oppression and punishment. Many years of denying the existence of same-sex relationships has led to denying lesbians access to their cultural history, allowing the heterosexual regime to claim this history for themselves (Cottingham, 1996: 74).

Lesbians are in many ways abject, a concept used by Judith Butler, the abject being that which does not fit within the social and symbolic order, and is excluded from that order. What creating a lesbian community that asserts their lesbian identities then aims to do is facilitate an environment of acceptance that is free of othering, while at the same time creating a framework within which lesbians from different contexts can develop their own lives and meaning. Being lesbian in isolation is therefore not a preferred state of being, as from a Western perspective this aids silence and erasure. Muholi and Nkabinde's lives and work thus feed into the assertion by many Western feminists that being lesbian "is not a matter of remaining isolated" but rather about seeking out and sharing things with other lesbians, in this way emphasizing the collective identities of lesbians (Hoagland, 1992: 199).

In actively seeking out other black lesbians and forming networks, organisations and communities, this can be viewed as a form of activism against dominant structures that aim to keep black lesbians isolated and marginalized. However, this can also be viewed as a disruption of more secretive and 'closeted' forms of female same-sex identities. In Africa, issues related to sexuality and gender have predominantly been kept in the private sphere. This private sphere of secrecy and silence can also be positive in the way that it protects certain same-sex encounters from being policed in violent ways. Western liberal norms of coming-out and positioning oneself in the public sphere, can have the opposite effect in non-western cultures – instead of freedom, these ideals can bring danger, and this is evidenced in the rise of lesbophobic hate crimes currently being experienced by many black lesbians. What's more, in the past, African women in same-sex relationships, within varying circumstances have found ways to go between these two extremes of coming-out and remaining closeted.

Conclusion

Some lesbians and gays feel we don't need to copy everything that straight couples are doing. Sometimes there is no particular role or sometimes they might take a particular role for a particular relationship and the next relationship they take a completely different role. We call it "mixed masala". These days, couples who want to do the role playing thing might feel stigmatised by more progressive attitudes. The progressives say, "Why copy? Why can't we be just women who love women or just men who love men without role playing?"

Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, 2009.

As this chapter has shown, the negotiation of black lesbian identities within the current South African climate is as filled with possibilities as it is with obstacles. Muholi and Nkabinde as

embodiments of South Africa's hybridity, represent a negotiation of sexual identity on many levels – religiously, racially, as citizens, as women, and as self-identified lesbians – all informed by South Africa's history and the present globalized state. Although both Muholi and Nkabinde come from a Zulu-Christian background, they have no doubt been influenced by Western feminism and certain conceptualisations of sexuality, having grown up in the era of feminism and women's rights. Through their communication and involvement with other women who practice same-sex intimacy (whether self-identifying as lesbian or not), both Muholi and Nkabinde have found ways to better understand their identities, their culture, and their places within the South African landscape.

As noted in the introductory chapter, there is a need for more “oral histories and autobiographies that explore the lives of black gay people in diverse black gay communities” and this is integral in fully understanding “the experience of being black and gay” (bell hooks, 2000: 69). Therefore, through expression and communication, Muholi and Nkabinde have found creative avenues that come up against the silence, erasure and marginalisation that they face as black lesbians, and in the process creating *her-story* for future generations. But this has come at a price. The westernization of African female same-sex intimacy as ‘lesbian’ has brought with it the marginalisation of other indigenous forms of female same-sex intimacy, while also increasing the violent policing of public ‘lesbian’ sexual identities. “It is bitter to acknowledge that this phase in which women lesbian activists are beginning to demand their rights may, for all its liberatory potential in the long term, demand many victims in the short run” (Morgan and Wieringa, 2005: 20). In addition, as demonstrated in the section on Pride, black lesbians in many ways experience a double oppression, one from patriarchy and heteronormativity, and one from their location in the history of South Africa as black women.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This thesis opened with a description of Lulu Xingwana's response to some of the work on display at The Innovative Women exhibition (2010) opening at Constitution Hill. Xingwana's description of the images as "immoral", "against nation building", "pornographic", and "offensive" acted as a starting point for my inquiry into black lesbian identities in South Africa. This inquiry required a survey of South Africa's political, social, sexual, cultural and religious histories, the effects of which have filtered into the present. Despite the goal of a 'new' South Africa, the effects of colonialism, apartheid and democracy have all influenced the current tumultuous navigation of black female sexual identities, practices and spaces.

Contemporary views of same-sex intimacy as immoral has at once fed into and been fostered by an amalgamation of religious and political agendas from the era of exploration and colonisation, to the present. Xingwana's comments, when put into the broader context of discourses about sexuality within Africa, need to be situated within a historical legacy of racist colonial research and imaginings about African sexuality often disguised as 'scientific', as well as understandings of immorality as framed by certain religious and cultural ideologies also imported from the West and sanctioned by apartheid. So while many African political leaders may profess that homosexuality and by extension all forms of same-sex intimacy are imports from the West, there is also evidence for the view that homophobia is equally part of the western legacy.

Current debates and views on 'deviant' sexualities, such as lesbianism, have thus spurred much investigation and interdisciplinary research, and this thesis contributes to that project. The importance of this research becomes more urgent in the current South African

context given the recent surge of violence against black lesbian women, many of whom have lost their loved ones, in and around urban townships. This highlights the plight of many African lesbian activists such as Zanele Muholi and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde in finding an end to these atrocities against women, which are plaguing our townships. The lives and work of Muholi and Nkabinde show the intersectionality of religion, sexuality and identity. Therefore, their contributions are significant when attempting to theorize about the possible strategies available to black lesbians in the present, in trying to negotiate their sexual and gender identities within South Africa.

My argument throughout this thesis is based on the assertion that religion and culture, whether directly or indirectly, has had (and continues to have) a very powerful affect on the way that self-identified black lesbians negotiate their sexual identity within South Africa. As such, we find the lives and work of Muholi and Nkabinde reflect how intricately entwined the spheres of religion, identity, gender and sexuality are, as well as subtle and sometimes paradoxical negotiations between tradition and modernity, religion and state, collectivity and individual agency.

Religion during Colonialism

Many researchers have demonstrated that various forms of same-sex conduct were sanctioned in pre-colonial African cultures. While these forms of intimacy were not associated with a fixed sexual orientation, they were still incorporated within cultures and rituals. Stories of African people's lives, their beliefs, their rituals and meanings, have largely been told through the eyes and voices of European anthropologists, ethnographers and missionaries during the age of exploration and later colonialism. Colonial representations of African sexuality have been central to many taboos and laws about African sexuality. During colonialism, the denial of African religious customs and the import of Christianity, along

with the racialized judgements on African sexuality as perverse, have over time translated into the current negative views of same-sex practices as unAfrican. It has also been deduced that the hybridity of the beliefs that many black South African men and women hold are also the consequence of colonial expansion. These beliefs and ideologies have been influenced by indigenous ideologies as well as those brought from the western world during imperial expansion.

During colonialism, missionaries spread the beliefs of Christianity, seeking converts and influencing many indigenous African lifestyles and belief systems, taking them as slaves and occupying their land. As noted in chapter three, the ‘othering’ of African cultures and sexualities, which labelled them inferior to the West, served as justification for racist imperialist regimes of power. Scientific theories such as evolutionism instrumentalized the view that “the highest level of ‘civilisation’ was that attained by Europeans, legitimising efforts of missionaries and colonisers to ‘civilise’ African peoples” (Cornwall, 2005: 2). Part of this civilising mission involved Christian-centric European understandings of the nature of sexuality, morality and sin which in turn have impacted the ways in which current African views of sexuality have been produced.

Colonialism thus facilitated the view of African men and women as hypersexualized beings needing to be controlled and civilized. This view has filtered into contemporary discourses that often present black men’s virility as positive and places emphasis on the number of women sexually available to them, while reinforcing black women’s dependence on men through public discourses that emphasize their domesticity. So when African women live openly as lesbians, it removes them from the realm of sexual availability and dependence in relation to men. Such lesbian independence from men is viewed as threatening to hetero-patriarchy and has resulted in the violent policing of black women’s sexualities.

Religion and Apartheid

After colonialism, proponents of apartheid instrumentalized particular Christian myths to further their ideological perspectives that encouraged the separation and dehumanisation of black people. Apartheid's strong association with Christianity and its assertion of same-sex intimacy as a sin has filtered into South Africa's current post-apartheid context, which still bares the scars of apartheid's strict policing of 'deviant' sexualities in the name of religion. The apartheid regime also reiterated some of the dominant discourses during colonialism that linked deviant sexuality to the black body, further hypersexualizing this body and the need for its control.

The policing of homosexuality during this regime was linked to the criminalisation of sodomy and the Immorality Amendment Act (1969), which also banned interracial sexual relations. During this time "same-sex sexuality had been criminalised, pathologised and forced underground," (Cameron, 2006: 4). The effects of this institutionalised policing of sexuality during apartheid can still be seen in the largely conservative social attitudes toward homosexuality among different cultures in South Africa. The current dispensation that emphasizes the freedom of religion and expressions of sexual identity thus fly in the face of many years of militarized control over these spheres.

Religion, Human Rights and the Constitution

Post-1994, sexuality has been placed in the public sphere and become entwined with the allocation and claiming of rights and citizenship, where the Constitution extends equal rights to all. In this light, issues of morality and religious beliefs in relation to accepted and unaccepted forms of sexual conduct and orientation should not have a place in broader debates about sexuality, as the rights to sexual freedom have been fixed in the Constitution. Yet, this is not the case, as South African citizens show complex negotiations between

liberatory ideals and traditional cultural norms that are in the main hetero-patriarchal. A constitution in many respects cannot attend to problems with gender inequality that are ingrained within religious and cultural frameworks that have not assimilated such views of gender equality.

Even within South Africa's democracy, there are still inconsistencies when laws and rights, which are theoretically available in relation to issues of religion, race and class, are not practically implemented. Religion and kinship structures often work hand in hand in the creation and maintenance of hegemonic ideas around sexuality; this often results in difficulty when sexuality rights put in place by the state attempt to be integrated into society. This is because religious beliefs that are part of sacred tradition and institutions tend to be more powerful within communities, than state sanctioned rights. This creates tension between the standards of the Constitution and, especially in the case of civil same-sex marriage, many cultural and religious institutions that reinforce the sanctity of the heterosexual marriage and family structure.

As noted in chapter four, because heterosexuality is often such a deeply imbedded cultural norm, non-heterosexuals often experience legal, social, cultural and religious alienation (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy and Moletsane, 2010: 8). Therefore a sense of citizenship and 'belonging' often does not come easy for queer individuals. The question of the use of human rights in an environment that is hostile to same-sex intimacy and relationships thus still remains (van Zyl, 2009: 366). South Africa's liberal Constitution is at odds with dominant cultural modes of making sense in the world.

Religion, Gender Roles and Lesbophobia

As shown in chapters three and four, by analysing the effects of colonialism, apartheid, ruling masculinity and religion, it is evident that current violent acts of lesbophobia are deeply

affected by understandings of right sexuality, morality, and gender roles, and ultimately what it means to be a human being. Roles and expectations of what it means to be a man or woman in the urban township context has been and continues to be influenced by a hybrid of beliefs and ideologies, such as those of Christianity and various African traditional religions, as well as the broader constitutional and political context that frames citizenship. Therefore, it is apparent that in South Africa there is a tension between the ideals of equality and freedom in the country's post-apartheid constitution and the prevalence of lesbophobia that results in discrimination and violence toward lesbians in urban townships.

The policing and controlling of lesbian bodies is related to the wider control over black female bodies that has manifested since colonialism. Black female bodies have for centuries been viewed as deviant and requiring civilizing, with emphasis placed on their sexual excess. In the post-colonial period, this view has resulted in black women's bodies being kept out of the public sphere, which has been a reaction to a problematic history of a hypersexualized female African body. By extension, this has had the effect of normalising black women's place in the private sphere. Black women's position within the private sphere has had both limiting and enabling effects. This position has facilitated the secretive and confined nature of gender-based violence, a common occurrence within the South African context, thus limiting their freedom of movement while controlling their bodies. Also, while providing a space for potential same-sex intimacies within female homosocial spaces, black women's position in the private sphere has also limited these expressions of sexual identity to this sphere. Limiting black women's bodies and sexuality to the private sphere has therefore further facilitated the often violent policing of these bodies and sexualities when represented in the public sphere. This policing and controlling is currently evident in the rise of gender based violence in South Africa, just as black women – such as self-identified black lesbians –

are increasingly finding public positions within political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

Dominant public discourses tend to present African masculinities and femininities as purely heterosexual and, as shown in chapter three, this belief has often been enforced through colonial research and African political leaders emphasizing heteropatriarchal religious and cultural practices in most parts of Africa. As Muholi observes, “in South African black culture, being a black lesbian is seen as negative, as destroying the nuclear heterosexual family, and as un-African” (2009: 19). This view goes hand in hand with embedded understandings of heterosexual masculinity and femininity. As noted by Gunkel, homophobia is strongly linked to the maintaining of heteronormative gender roles, as “homophobia is not only about repressing lesbianism, but is also a production of masculine heterosexuality” (Gunkel, 2010: 107). Therefore, by not conforming to heteronormative standards of femininity, lesbians are viewed as ‘deviants’ who want to be male, and these perspectives, when pushed to their extreme, result in ideas that condone the rape of lesbians.

Religion, Culture and Jacob Zuma

The spread of Christianity in the colonial period is evidenced today with the prominence of various African Christian churches, such as the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) and Isaiah Shembe’s Nazareth Baptist Church, as well as current president Jacob Zuma’s position as a Zulu patriarch and an adherent of evangelical Christianity.

Assumptions about African sexuality that facilitated colonial myths have now been reinscribed by political leaders in the current post-colonial context. Political leaders like Zuma and Xingwana often claim to speak in the name of the collective when reinforcing images of innate heterosexual identities and institutions, and thus reinforcing a homogenous African sexual identity that forms part of envisioning a unified nation. How sexuality has

been represented has therefore been central to the imagining and crafting of nationalism and authoritarian cultures (Lewis, 2011: 210).

As discussed in chapter four in the section on ‘ruling masculinity’, when accused of rape in 2006 Zuma appealed to his Zulu culture, stating that he was obliged to have sex with Kwezi because she was aroused. This appeal to Zulu culture tends to reiterate colonial discourses about African men that presented them as hypersexualised and prone to promiscuity. Simultaneously, however, Zuma’s image is also used to positively reinforce contemporary representations of African masculinity that tend to support colonial views of African men. The rape case against Zuma thus displayed a tendency to appeal “to so-called traditional and cultural values in order to restore a gender regime that: accepts men as being in dominant public positions within society, that continually allows violence against women and that prioritizes ‘traditional’ systems of controlling women in the postcolonial nation state” (Gunkel, 2010: 47). This appeal to ‘traditional and cultural values’ brings into question a possible return to religious fundamentalism, which presents a threat to the South Africa’s liberal Constitution.

Zuma’s innocent verdict after the rape trial shows how influential religious and cultural frameworks are within South African society, while often engaging with imbedded ideologies that tend to contradict the Constitution. This rape trial, combined with Zuma’s later statements on Heritage Day 2006 that accused homosexuals of being a disgrace to god, makes use of his cultural standing as a traditional god-fearing patriarch. Comments such as these, made by political, cultural and religious authorities like Jacob Zuma, reinforce and encourage discrimination toward same-sex intimacy. Therefore the authority of ruling masculinity combined with religious fundamentalist ideals, as possibly evidenced by Jacob Zuma, can indeed be a problem in the face of sexual rights, particularly those of women and homosexuals.

Religious and Cultural expressions of Female Same-Sex Intimacy

Throughout this thesis various cultural expressions of female same-sex relationships that have existed in Africa have been elaborated on, such as ‘mummy-baby’ relationships, women marriages, female-husbands, and ancestral wives. These types of intimacies are situated within broader African traditional religious and cultural schemes that have been normative in various parts of Africa. As shown in chapter three, this accords with observations by researchers that same-sex intimacy is often accepted and regulated within African religious and cultural imaginings and belief systems, that appear to work for the good of the community and are ordained by higher powers such as ancestors.

Varying contexts and influences come into play within these relationships, for instance when a female *sangoma* takes an ancestral wife to help her in her duties as a traditional healer, it is not seen as immoral, but rather ordained by the ancestor who has chosen the wife for her (Reid and Morgan 2003, Nkabinde 2009). In the main, sexual intimacy is also seen as taboo within these female relationships, as sexual intercourse is often understood as requiring a penis, but this does not mean that other forms of sexual encounters do not take place. This definition of sexual intercourse is one of the ways that female same-sex relationships have been rendered invisible, as these relationships cannot be defined as sexual from this reference point. These female same-sex relationships have also predominantly existed in the private sphere, and are often not talked about, facilitating secrecy and a denial of their existence in contemporary settings. Added to this, many reductionist notions of culture exclude the complexity present in traditions of African sexuality, and rather highlight patriarchal approaches to sexuality, which further marginalises these forms of intimacy.

Forms of same-sex relationships that are not linked to cultural frameworks or confined to the private sphere, such as 'lesbian', may be looked down upon and even punishable. This is because western concepts of homosexuality, such as lesbian identities, present sexual orientation as an important aspect of selfhood (Morgan and Reid, 2003: 382). Because selfhood within the African context is generally connected to the well being of the community, this individualistic definition of same-sex practices does not translate well into the African context. Nkabinde notes that in many ways she is more protected than other lesbians in the township, because of her status as a sangoma and the special connection she has with the ancestors and her status in the community, in this way she is able to straddle both African and Western conceptions of same-sex intimacy (2009: 147).

Current Negotiations of Black Lesbian Identity

This thesis has highlighted the ways that current negotiations of black lesbian identity borrow from a history that within African cultures has condoned same-sex intimacy; while also being situated within the realms of the new South Africa that shows the influences of Western imperialism, Christianity and globalisation (to name a few). Categories of sexualities such as 'lesbian' and 'gay' are thus, in the main, viewed as western imports, definitions for fixed sexual orientations imposed on the African context. This is then viewed in contrast to expressions of same-sex intimacy and relationships within Africa that are more grounded in the assuming of gender roles and show fluidity, rather than a strict sexual identity. Therefore, within the current negotiations of black lesbian identities, the "language and concepts that *police* simultaneously *produce* new desires, new intimacies and new possibilities of resistance, South African concepts of female same-sex intimacy and homosociality are increasingly re-named and re-conceptualized into a post/colonial sexuality apparatus as a

means of exercising power through heteronormativity and its gender regime” (Gunkel, 2010: 137).

As discussed in chapter five, as possible black lesbian role models, both Muholi and Nkabinde come from a Zulu-Christian background, while being influenced by Western feminism and certain conceptualisations of sexuality. The emphasis that Muholi and Nkabinde place on their lesbian identities is somewhat at odds with the ways that female same-sex intimacy in Africa has existed and been treated in the past. It can be surmised that homophobic notions of homosexuality as un-African do not, in the main, refer to more culturally specific forms of same-sex intimacy, but over time have come to include all manifestations of same-sex intimacy (Gunkel, 2010: 135). Asserting an exclusive same-sex orientation in the public sphere is thus incoherent with the way that black female same-sex intimacy has operated and been dealt with within existing social and cultural spaces and times from pre-colonialism to the present. Within this context, western ways of defining and approaching sexual orientation, that have become increasingly fixed, has tended to limit the fluidity of more indigenous African expressions of intimacy.

While the dominant sectors in the South African LGBTI rights movement might call for a specifically ‘lesbian’ identity for black women who participate in same-sex practices to better locate them within the global scheme of sexual identity definitions, this creates tensions between indigenous articulations and current discourses of globalised articulations of sexuality. South Africa’s diverse traditional, cultural, and religious context makes it difficult to negotiate ‘lesbian’ identities for black women, as this requires rethinking the position of the self within broader cultural contexts. Identifying as lesbian within the black South African context currently carries with it many negative connotations within urban townships, and denotes some sort of agency and individuality that goes against certain heteronormative

religious and cultural beliefs where one's sexuality and gendered role fits into a broader structure that looks out for the greater good of the community, which feeds into the view of homosexuality as unAfrican.

Nkabinde demonstrates this tension between religious heteronormative customs and her identity as a lesbian in the way she expresses her views on virginity testing in relation to her dominant ancestor's views. Nkabinde is in a sense torn between two worlds, that of her liberal lesbian identified life that speaks to the equality of genders and does not agree with virginity testing; and that of obeying and respecting her ancestors and following tradition. Her dominant ancestor the patriarch Nkunzi is in many ways the antithesis of what she stands for as an out and proud self-identified lesbian. Nkabinde even negotiates with Nkunzi when it comes to the women she has relationships with, noting that he has to be kept happy for her to be successful in her role as *sangoma*. This demonstrates some of the many complexities and obstacles in her identity as a lesbian *sangoma*.

The strategies that Muholi and Nkabinde use to establish their lesbian identities, such as seeking out other black lesbians, publicly expressing sexual identity, claiming a fixed sexual orientation, and self-identifying as lesbian, all show a shift in the location of black female sexuality from the private sphere to the public sphere. This shift feeds into western discourses that have also framed South Africa's post-apartheid Constitution, which are in contrast to many hierarchical indigenous cultural and religious ways of making sense of the world. Adopting a specifically 'lesbian' identity thus facilitates particular performances of intimacy and sexuality that are fixed over space and time. This lack of fluidity attached to the concept of lesbian then ascribes to many black lesbians a masculine gender identity that is at odds with the dominant gender regime that links gender roles and identities to biological sex. In the broader social and cultural scheme, this strict sexual identity is therefore assumed as a

threat to dominant discourses, and as wanting to usurp the power of men within these hierarchical heteronormative frameworks.

Muholi and Nkabinde express a strong yearning to be remembered and to create documents that will form part of future memory and history, they thus try to bring together and cross boundaries of the indigenous/traditional/accommodating/secretive and modern/post-modern/public/confrontational. While these border crossings can be liberatory, at present there are many women's lives in danger precisely because these borders are so guarded by particular cultural and political factors. This process of negotiation, acceptance and integration will take time and can be facilitated through projects such as those of Muholi and Nkabinde.

Through their communication and involvement with other women who practice same-sex intimacy (whether self-identifying as lesbian or not), both Muholi and Nkabinde have found ways to better understand their identities, their culture, and their places within the South African landscape. They advocate for the rights and expression of black lesbian identity, as they believe that without a history the future of many black lesbians "will continue to be lost, denied, trivialized, and otherwise damaged" (Cottingham 1996: 75). Muholi and Nkabinde thus provide a rich source of information about the varying obstacles that black lesbians face in the negotiation of their sexual identities in the current South African climate and how diverse these experiences are.

By drawing comparisons and contrasts between Muholi and Nkabinde one is able to see the complexities present in formulating a lesbian identity as a black woman within and around urban townships. These women, like Muholi and Nkabinde, may be Zulu, may have grown up in a township, may share many similarities, but this does not mean that they can be treated as a homogenous group of women. This thesis thus shows the intricacies present in day-to-

day negotiations of black lesbian identities and the many challenges black lesbians face, demonstrating how religion in its many manifestations infiltrates this negotiation within South Africa. In our globalised context, the current formation of black 'lesbian' identities are indicative of, while also being a product of, the transformation of imbedded cultural and traditional frameworks in Africa. This 'new' form of sexual identity is therefore a challenge to traditions that appear crystallized, as projected by many religious, cultural and political authorities. As is the case with the post-modern subject, Muholi and Nkabinde's sexual identities are thus simultaneously at odds with and entwined in their religious cultural identities. Moreover, given that religious traditions are constantly in the process of negotiation, it is also possible that Muholi's and Nkabinde's work, if successful, might impact future views of sexuality as they develop within emerging forms of local African tradition and African Christianity.

As I have shown, the persistence of the marginalization of black lesbians in and around urban townships demonstrates a dynamic mix of religious and cultural ideologies, and political influences. Issues of secrecy, power, racism, exoticism, domination and oppression all play a part in illustrating the contemporary understandings of normative sexuality within post-apartheid South Africa. Certain located and historical practices in South Africa have normalised the violent policing of 'deviant' sexualities, particularly within black communities in and around urban townships. There are thus many layers and dynamics at play when implementing the strategies that Muholi and Nkabinde employ in relation to their sexual identities. Zanele Muholi's and Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde's lives and work reflect the current place that black lesbians occupy in South Africa, as well as light the way for inspiring new strategies for the creation of black lesbian identities, but not without its obstacles.

As has been proven throughout this thesis, religion as both limiting and enabling informs human rights, beliefs and ideologies, and cultural norms, thus framing South Africa's

history, while providing a framework for many cultural manifestations of same-sex intimacy to flourish in African societies. Some scholars have argued that “there has been a tendency amongst Western feminists to undervalue African women’s agency in creatively responding to social and cultural circumstances” (Reid and Walker, 2005: 186-7). In this thesis I have illustrated that women like Muholi and Nkabinde are creative, assertive and challenging African women who in different ways contrast, transform and redefine dominant gender norms and assumptions about women’s sexual identities. The emerging interdisciplinary archive on same-sex practices in Africa, and particularly South Africa, can thus be understood as a challenge to Western colonial, feminist and queer studies that tend to impose their definitions and meanings onto the African continent. And this research in turn can be used to better understand the current religious, cultural and political landscape of South Africa.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Althusser, Louis. 1971. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1969), in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London, New Left Books.

Aronson, Lisa. 2012. "Gender and South African Art". In *African Arts*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Winter 2012), pp. 1-5.

Baderoon, Gabeba. 9 March 2010. "On Looking and not Looking: A Response to Minister Lulu Xingwana's Comments about the Innovative Women Exhibition (in South Africa)." Date accessed': 19/10/2010 <http://www.femininemoments.dk/blog/on-looking-and-not-looking/>

Baderoon, Gabeba. 2011. "Intimacy and History: The Art of Identity and Difference in South Africa." In *Visual Century: South African Art in Contact*, Mario Pissarra, Thembinkosi Goniwe and Mandisi Majavu (Eds.), Volume 4: 1990–2007 (pp. 74-91). Univ. of Witwatersrand Press, Johannesburg.

Blignaut, Charl. 17 July 2011. "Love in a time of murder", in *Sunday Times Lifestyle Magazine*.

Bregman, Joel and Peter, Angy. 1 February 2012. "Killers of Zoliswa Nkonyana finally sentenced", Social Justice Coalition. Date Accessed: 28/02/2012 <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/pag...>

Brundrit, Jean. 2010. "A Lesbian Story", in *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 590-598.

Routledge.

Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge:

New York.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies the Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"*. Routledge: New

York.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. Routledge: New York.

Cameron, Edwin. 2006. "Foreword", in *Pride: Protest and Celebration*. Shaun De Waal and Anthony Manion (Eds.), Fanele, an imprint of Jacana Media.

Chidester, David. 2002. "Global Citizenship, Cultural Citizenship and World Religions", in *Religion Education*. Occasional Paper Series, Number 1. Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press.

Chidester, David. 2012. *Wild Religion: Tracking the Sacred in South Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cornwall, Andrea. 2005. "Introduction: Perspectives of Gender in Africa", in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, Andrea Cornwall (Ed.), Indiana University Press.

- Cottingham, Laura. 1996. "Notes on lesbian", in *Art Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, We're Here: Gay and lesbian Presence in Art and Art History (Winter, 1996), pp. 72-77. College Art Association.
- Coullie, Judith Lutge; Meyer, Stephan; Ngwenya, Thengani H.; and Olver, Thomas. 2006. "Introduction", in *Selves in Question: Interviews on Southern African Auto/biography*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Daly, Mary. 1973. *Beyond God the Father: toward a philosophy of women's liberation*. Beacon Press: Boston.
- Davis, Rebecca. 9 October 2012. "Johannesburg gay pride parade pits politics against partying". *Daily Maverick*, part of the Guardian Africa Network. Date accessed: 20/11/2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/09/joburg-gay-pride>
- Deal, William E. and Beal, Timothy K. 2004. *Theory for Religious Studies*. Routledge: London and New York.
- Diesel, Alleyn. 2011. "Introduction", in *Reclaiming the L-Word: Sappho's Daughters Out in Africa*, Alleyn Diesel (Ed). Modjaji Books 2011, pp. xi-xviii.
- Douglas, Mary. 2002 (First published 1966). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of concept of pollution and taboo*. Routledge Classics: London and New York.

- Epprecht, Marc. 2008. *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Esack, Farid and Mahomed, Nadeem. 2011. "Sexual Diversity, Islamic Jurisprudence and Sociality", in *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa*, Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 41-57. Centre for Constructive Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Evans, Sally. 2010. "'This is not art!': Lulu Xingwana". *The Times Online*. Date accessed: 22/09/2010 <http://news.za.msn.com/article.aspx?cp-documentid=152382300>
- Ferguson, Ann. 1981. "Patriarchy, Sexual Identity, and the Sexual Revolution". In *Signs*, Vol.7, No.1 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 158-172. The University of Chicago Press.
- Ferguson, Ann. 2007. "Gay Marriage: An American and Feminist Dilemma", in *Hypatia*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Winter 2007, pp. 39-57. Indiana University Press.
- Fingerson, Laura. 2006. *Girls in Power: Gender, Body, and Menstruation in Adolescence*. State University of New York Press.
- Frederiks, Martha. 2003. "Miss Jairus Speaks: Developments in African Feminist Theology". In *Exchange*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pp. 66-82.
- Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ). 2008. *Unspoken Facts: A History of Homosexualities in Africa*.

Gevisser, Mark. 1999. "Homosexuality in Africa. An interpretation and overview of homosexuality in both traditional and modern African societies". In *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, K. A. Appiah and H. L. Gates (E.ds). New York: Basic Civitas Books.

Gevisser, Mark. 2000. "Mandela's Stepchildren". In *DiVerent Rainbows*, P.Ducker (Ed.), Gay Men's Press: London.

Gevisser, Mark and Cameron, Edwin. 1995. *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa*. Routledge

Godby, Michael. 2010. "Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin's photographs for *the Bantu tribes of South Africa* (1928-1954): the construction of an ambiguous idyll". In *Kronos* (Bellville) vol.36 no.1 Cape Town Nov. 2010 Date accessed 11/09/12
<http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/kronos/v36n1/v36a03.pdf>

Gqola, Pumla Dineo. 2007. "How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender based violence in contemporary South Africa", in *African Identities*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp.111-124. Routledge: Taylor and Francis

Gqola, Pumla Dineo. 2006. "Through Zanele Muholi's Eyes: Re/Imagining Ways of Seeing Black Lesbians" in *Only Half the Picture*, Zanele Muholi ed. Michael Stevenson and STE: Cape Town, pp. 82-89.

Gunkel, Henriette. 2009. "Through the Postcolonial Eyes: Images of Gender and Female Sexuality in Contemporary South Africa", in *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 13:77-87. Taylor and Francis Group.

Gunkel, Henriette. 2010. *The Cultural Politics of Female Sexuality in South Africa*. Routledge.

Hays, Sharon. 1994. "Structure and agency and the sticky problem of culture" in *Sociological Theory* (March 1994), 12:1. American Sociological Association, Washington. date accessed?

Hoagland, Sarah Lucia. 1992. "Why *Lesbian Ethics*?" In *Hypatia*, Vol. 7, No. 4, Lesbian Philosophy (Autumn, 1992), pp. 195-206. Blackwell Publishing

Hoffman, Katherine. 1996. *Conceptions of Identity: Historical and Contemporary Images and Portraits of Self and Family*. Westview Press.

hooks, bell. 2000. "Homophobia in Black Communities," In *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*. Delroy Constantine-Simms (ed). Alyson Books: Loss Angeles and New York.

Human Rights Watch World Report. 1995. South Africa. Date accessed 03/12/12
<http://www.hrw.org/en/world-report-1995/south-africa>

Irigaray, Luce. 1993. "Religious and Civil Myths" (April 1987) and "The Neglect of Female Genealogies," (March 1987). In *Je, Tu, Nous*, translated by A. Martin. Routledge: London and New York.

Irigaray, Luce. 2004. *Luce Irigaray: Key Writings*. Continuum: London and New York.

Jones, Michelle. 7 May 2012. "Burglar loots photographer's work on black lesbians" in *Cape Times News*.

Josephy, Svea. March 2004. "Jean Brundrit", *Art Throb: Art Bio*. Editions for Art Throb.

Date Accessed: 10/03/2007 <http://www.artthrob.co.za/04mar/artbio.html>

Kieran, Matthew. 2005. *Revealing Art*. Routledge Publishers: London and New York.

King, Ursula. 1995. "Introduction", in *Religion and Gender*. Ursula King (Ed.), Oxford: Blackwell.

Kosinski, Dorothy M. 1998. "Gustave Courbet's "The Sleepers." The Lesbian Image in Nineteenth-Century French Art and Literature." In *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol.9, No. 18 (1998), pp. 187-199. IRSA sc

Lazreg, Marnia. 2005. "Decolonizing Feminism" in *African Gender Studies: A Reader*.

Oyeronke Oyewumi ed. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 67-80.

Lewis, Desiree. 1996. "The Cardinals and Bessie Head's Allegories of the Self". In *World Literature Today*, Vol. 70, No. 1, South African Literature in Transition (Winter 1996), pp. 73-77. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma.

Lewis, Desiree. 2005. "Against the grain: black women and sexuality", in *Agenda*, 19:63, pp. 11-24. Routledge

Lewis, Desiree. 2011. "Representing African sexualities", in *African Sexualities: A Reader*, Sylvia Tamale ed. Pambazuka Press

Lock Swarr, Amanda. 2009. "Stabane: Intersexuality and Same-sex relationships in South Africa", in *Feminist Studies* Fall2009, Vol. 35, Issue 3, p524-548.

Lohmann, Roger Ivar and Sered, Susan Star. 2007. "Introduction: objects, gender, and religion", in *Material Religion*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 4-13. Trent University and Suffolk University.

Mbiti, John S. 1989. *African Religions and Philosophy*, Second Edition. Heinemann Publishers.

Mikell, Gwendolyn. 1995. "African Feminism: Toward a Politics of Representation". In *Feminist Studies*, Vol.21, No. 2 (Summer 1995), pp. 405-424. Feminist Studies, Inc.

Mitchell, W.J.T. 1992. "Introduction: Utopia and Critique", in *Art and the Public Sphere*. University of Chicago Press.

Mkhize, Nonhlanhla; Bennett, Jane; Reddy, Vasu; and Moletsane, Relebohile. 2010. *The Country we want to Live in: Hate crimes and homophobia in the lives of black lesbian South Africans*. Policy Analysis and Capacity Enhancement Research Programme Occasional Paper 1, Human Sciences research Council. HSRC Press.

Morgan, Ruth and Reid, Graeme. 2003. "I've Got Two Men and One Woman': Ancestors, Sexuality and Identity among Same-Sex Identified Women Traditional Healers in South Africa", in *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (Sep. – Oct. 2003), pp. 375-391.

Morgan, Ruth and Wieringa, Saskia. 2005. "Introduction" in *Tommy Boys, lesbian men and ancestral wives: female same-sex practices in Africa*. Jacana Media

Muholi, Zanele. 2008. "Ngiyopha: A Photo-biographical Project," www.zanelemuholi.com
date accessed?

Muholi, Zanele. 2006. *Only Half the Picture*. Michael Stevenson and STE: Cape Town

Muholi, Zanele. 2007. *Being* – Artist comments. Michael Stevenson Website,
<http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/muholi/being.htm>
Date Accessed 19/10/2010.

Muholi, Zanele. 2009. *Mapping our Histories: A Visual History of Black Lesbians in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. PDF document, Date Accessed: 05/10/2010

www.zanelemuholi.com

Muholi, Zanele. 2011a. "I have truly lost a woman I loved", in *Reclaiming the L-Word: Sappho's Daughters Out in Africa*, Alleyn Diesel (ed). Modjaji Books 2011, pp. 11-25.

Muholi, Zanele, 2011b. "Thinking through lesbian rape", in *Reclaiming the L-Word: Sappho's Daughters Out in Africa*, Alleyn Diesel (ed). Modjaji Books 2011, pp. 187-199. (originally published in Agenda vol 61 2004).

Nath, Dipika. 10 October 2012. "Gay Pride is Political". Thought Leader, Mail and Guardian. <http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/dipikanath/2012/10/10/gay-pride/> date accessed: 20/11/2012

Nel, P.J. 2008. "Morality and Religion in African Thought", in *Acta Theologica* 2008:2

Nfah-Abbenyi, Juliana Makuchi. 2005. "Decolonizing Feminism" in *African Gender Studies: A Reader*. Oyeronke Oyewumi ed. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 259-278.

Ngcobo, Gabi. 2006. "Introduction" in *Only Half the Picture*, Zanele Muholi ed. Michael Stevenson and STE: Cape Town, pp.4-5

Nkabinde, Nkunzi with Morgan, Ruth. 2005. "Chapter Seven", in *Tommy Boys, lesbian men and ancestral wives: female same-sex practices in Africa*. Jacana Media

Nkabinde, Nkunzi Zandile. 2009. *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian*

Sangoma. Fanele: an imprint of Jacana Media

Perez, Hiram. 2005. "You Can Have My Brown Body And Eat It, Too!". In *Social Text* 84-85, Vol. 23, No. 3-4, Fall-Winter 2005, pp. 171-191. Duke University Press.

Pithouse, Richard. 29 March 2011. "Only Protected on paper". The South African Civil Society Information Service (SACSIS). <http://www.sacsis.org.za/site/article/644.1>
date accessed: 05/04/2011

Posel, Deborah. 2011. "'Getting the nation talking about sex': reflections on the politics of sexuality and nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa", in *African Sexualities: A Reader*, Sylvia Tamale ed. Pambazuka Press.

Pucherova, Dobrota. 2011. "A Romance That Failed: Bessie Head and Black Nationalism in 1960s South Africa". In *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Summer, 2011), pp. 105-124. Indiana University Press.

Rafapa, L.J., Nengome, A.Z. and Tshamano, H.S. 2011. "Instances of Bessie Head's distinctive feminism, womanism and Africanism in her novels". In *Tydiskryf vir Letterkunde*, Vol. 48, No. 2.

- Ratele, Kopano. 2008. "Ruling masculinities in post-apartheid South Africa", in *Development with a Body: Sexuality, Human Rights and Development*. Andrea Cornwall, Sonia Correa, Susie Jolly (eds). Zed Books Ltd. pp. 121-135.
- Ratele, Kopano. 2011. "Male sexualities and masculinities", in *African Sexualities: A Reader*, Sylvia Tamale ed. Pambazuka Press.
- Ray, R. and Korteweg, A.C. 1999. "Women's Movements in the Third World: Identity, Mobilisation, and Autonomy". In *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 25, pp. 47-71. Annual Reviews.
- Reid, Graeme and Walker, Liz. 2005. "Sex and secrecy: A focus on African sexualities" (Editorial Introduction), in *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, May 2005; 7(3): 185-194. Taylor and Francis Group.
- Reid, Graeme and Dirsuweit, Teresa. 2002. "Understanding Systemic Violence: Homophobic Attacks in Johannesburg and its Surrounds" in *Urban Forum*. EBSCO Publishing
- Resch, Robert Paul. 1992. *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory*. (Online electronic book), Berkeley: University of California Press, c1992. Date accessed 11/09/12 <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft3n39n8x3/>

Schutte, Gillian. 8 October 2012. "Johannesburg's Gay Pride Parade: Not Much to Be Proud Of". The South Africa Civil Society Information Service (SACSIS). Date accessed: 20/11/2012 <http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/1450>

Semenya, Boshadi. c.2008. Book Review: Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbain sangoma by Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde (2008). (Department of Psychology, UNISA)

Smith, David. 2 March 2010, "South African minister describes lesbian photos as immoral," on www.guardian.co.uk, (accessed 22/09/2010).

Smith, Gail. 2006. "Outlaw Culture". In *Zanele Muholi: Only half the picture*. STE Publishers: Johannesburg. (Article was originally published in the *Mail & Guardian*, 3-9 September 2004)

Stobie, Cheryl. 2011. "'He uses my body': female traditional healers, male ancestors and transgender in South Africa", in *African Identities*, 9:2, 149-162.

Tamale, Sylvia. 2011. "Researching and theorising sexualities in Africa", in *African Sexualities: A Reader*, Sylvia Tamale ed. Pambazuka Press

Theron, Liesl. 2010. "Accessibility of Shelters for LGBT People in Cape Town". In *A Tapestry of Human Sexuality in Africa*. Oka Obono (ed). Fanele – an imprint of Jacano Media Ltd.

Unknown Author. The Circle of Concerned African Theologians: Profile

<http://www.thecirclecawt.org/profile.html?PHPSESSID=a796b0ed0a4552e2e85a53799b655ec1>. (accessed: 27/05/2013)

van Zyl, Mikki. 2009. "Beyond the Constitution: From Sexual Rights to Belonging", in *The Prize and the Price: Shaping Sexualities in South Africa*, Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl eds. HSRC Press, pp.364-390.

Weiringa, Saskia. 2005. "Chapter Nine", in *Tommy Boys, lesbian men and ancestral wives: female same-sex practices in Africa*. Jacana Media